Marcel Ray Duriez

Nevaeh

Book: 66

Dear Diary

1

Maiara Chenoa was the mom of a child named Bryana. 'Taking her the way I did was not something I wanted to do, yet being a fallen angel, that is what I must do.'

~Nevaeh~

Clash- The story of Maggie's grandparents.

1

Dear Diary,

I am so frightened; I can hardly hold this pen. I am printing rather than

writing in cursive because that way I have more control.

What am I terrified of; you ask?

HER!

You can see how shaky even my printing is. Suppose my hands shake like this when I go in to see the other girl.

I am being selfish, I know, in just talking about what is going…

'My brain is slow this time of day.'

He stood by the window and sipped his coffee. The view over the not

so spectacular- was feeling just as dead as him on the inside.

About enough of it all. I have had about enough! Enough of this place and simply cannot take it any longer, it was time to see her.

I look around me and see gray walls of concrete covering the entire perimeter of the room.

An iron-wired bunk bed occupies the far-left corner of the room with one white pillow and a white blanket on the top bunk. On the top right of the wall is a window. It is the only light aside from the brightness of the white linens, the only

connection to the outside world. I would try to use the window to escape, but they put up bars to prevent that from happening.

Again...

Right now, I am sitting on the cemented bench by the wooden door across from the bed, staring at the wall. The room, in general, is cold, damp, and dark, but it is better than what I use to call home.

Aside from that, I just cannot take it any longer, but, honestly, what can I do? I have tried..., only to fill. Once I even tried dressing up as one of the guards,

but I was caught and the result…was not at all a pretty sight. I never imagined getting lost inside my head. There are always stories about those that cannot get away. But I was always one of those who could. I could escape and live again, but my mother had warned me that one day, I might not come back. I should have a list listened to her warning. It started just like any other. I pushed through the darkness, sure that I would come back. I watched the nightmares flow past and laughed at their fear.

A chill suddenly ran down my spine that made me feel like I was about

to die. That draws my attention to only one thought was her.

There was a fight last night with my wife I knew- she did not- I get it- she did not. (Her plan to kill me… I did not know) I get into my car 1953 Chevy in the color of green, dread for the long trip I must make, it a job that I must have, or I lost everything and to see my younger girl over the way that the wifey knows about as of last night… it is time to go- the moonlight my way. The kiss there her problem now- I have a 2nd family over in Ca. I live in Cresson Pa, where what is- like- under the ground is more substantial than what is above it.

I hear the worrying of the old motor- the car is only 5 years old but has seen lots of these trips 45 if you well over and back to get it in and out. The trip started nice and slow- like they all do I have made this lots of times as I said, my woman no’s this too- she knows all about me yet nothing about me. We see me the man behind the wall, looking for his young lost to be there at the end of this trip, and for a new life- where she does not blow everything- and shove it in my face. On the highway, the music starts to flow out- I hum to it.

2

I make the pass around cars- as you do on the road when on a deadline… All types of lines time, dead, and past- I think that now. Like roadkill in-between the yellow lines! Sights- sounds- flying by doing 40. Town's- homes- life going by- in a haze- as the sun comes up over the hilltops.

Trees- bending over too as the car rushes by them. The wind in his hair, with it down- he was loving life… not his wife!

F-U he said looking at the photos! See the wheels spinning in the stop and go… one hand on the wheel- sunglass is

now in his middle age head. The black hairs dyed and slicked back… like a mid-life circuses ass hole- that was trying to get young ass in his pants- and that he did- he scored a hot young thing only 15.

The same age as his little girl at home… sick they said.

Yet it did not matter to him.

Between two hills the game started, going up the grade… the truck was pulling a boxcar. Big have- hauling ass!

Room!

3

The Jake brake was letting it all out too slow for me! The clash was on! Looking at the time on the dash- it is now 9 am. which was 8:59 on his hand which and that was pissing him off that it was not right for the other- I need to change what he said. Looking at the speedometer the man sees the speed up taking place… the first pass was made by me ‘this man is killing me- I have to get there on time- to- to see- see my baby and have a job- my- my boss is going to- kill my ass if not!’

The truck big red, 32 headlights- big mean grill- coming for me- and piss- as it runs me off the road some- and this game was like this for 5 miles! Back and

forth this went smashing into me… bumper-to-bumper- hit- kicking and pulling on my old sheet metal!

4

Grinding and twisting, jerking, and twitching! Pressing down on my left foot on the gas- fast- fast- I say- he wants to KILL me! I saw it in the eyes behind me now, that he is chasing me down- wanting me to pass- yet if I do pass- and get in front he was to make me the 8 balls on the pool table. 18 wells in my face kicking rocks and dust! Cracking the glass- of my car- what does he want with me? Doing 120- now I must be- I look and see 124. I

see the smoky-ness out of the two pipes- just spewing blackness in the air- a joke he was me to breathe in!

The train next to us- is not even keeping up at this point, it was on the run the whole time- back and forth. 3 lane highway- with big dips and twists- I rack with- him and these cars- over and over- his not caring about anything- only doing the job and that is doing me in- I hear him say- to a woman on the phone when I stop to take a piss at this café 2 miles back. Getting gas and the man clawing all over my car trying to find money to be made- he said I need a new belt- it is going to snap- in less than 50 mils.

5

'Yah- Yah- Yah- if you say so!' The train is coming, and this truck keeps easing me onto the tracks… the car is hitting some on the one side… yet I get away going behind the last train car as the gate lifted some- he could not yet, I got ahead some and the dance start yet again- playing with me toying- if you well with my mind- asking me to pass and him- back and forth the game went for a night!

I got out at one point saying- 'just run me over!' that is what he wanted me to do- yet, that was not fun for this man- it was not enough he wanted me as road

kill- the gears groaned- for him to star the movie on me standing there- my woman did this he said, it must have been played for him to do this with this souped-up diesel… it was going to be long and slow… all plant- the truck races from me as I scream profanities, he's doing 150- and the brakes come on just missing my head one be an inch or so… he said to get in the car- and duel me for your life!

Always risky to pass- he even said to, and I did and the oncoming car- hit me some- knocking me in the dirt and dust. Yet dust is all around in Ca, I ran over a cactus…?

He said confused… mouth bleeding and head thumping- his wife's photo falling in his lap- like it was telling him something. I see the train over there blowing its horn at the drive of this 1920's 18wheeler is he in on it too?

I questioned…?

Yes- Yes- Yes- it all for me to die! The road now is dart- gate put up I have no clue where I am at- so off my pathway that I know so well, the seat belt cutting into me as he makes another hit on the ass end of my car. The belt on the fan goes pud- pud- pud- I lose of freaking mind- the truck keeps creeping in on me

slow like playing- tap- tap- tapping me up the hill- on this death road with no side rails. And there is the train- coming on to us as I land on the cross tracks- is it going to be me or him that gets hit? The train is coming, I see it out the side window- and it was lights out for me- grinding me out!

Yes- Yes- Yes- My loving wife- My sweet- wife was the one, that did this… And this is me saying the story of the wife- the story of me saying that- I got you- baby!

Rot in hell! I will sleep with the guy in the truck now! The car went over

the cliff next to the viaduct the train was nearing… and it all ended in an explosion!

Dear Diary- I never thought this would be the last thing I would say.

<3

(Back)

(Amend Time)

Enchanted Sea’s

Oh, I remember them… all! All History and remember the world we had called Earth, yet I also remember the other world that I have made- exactly right next to us and then far away too- where love was love nothing more nothing less, and hate was the height of passion.

Nevaeh- And then just like ripping out of a dream I am back in my bed, in my world, as little old-Nevaeh.

And my life has much more meaning now, looking into someone else’s.

It saved me from the sin of having fins.

And, that night- That night, I saved a mermaid.

Nevaeh- The shadow- that shows through- from within and then back out. On the walls and within me, and them alike, I feel all this power having a tool on me, 'Stamina is everything, that is energy and strength.’ 'I got stamina- don’t give up, I won’t give up- I got stamina!’

Damen’s within me is becoming ever so darker backing out my eyes, as I

focus on mine all the time if I want my privacy or not, they see into me and out and looking into my eyes reflecting it see them within me, tricks me to listen, really listen to them all the time, like now you must hear me. More time has passed and all I have is recollections of all things lingering, I know that I am going to have to turn my power over to another woman, I then press my lips together and nod, my voice beaten by the one in my head influence- it, I already knew- whom it was: Tell you all that I am not crazy- I hear the voices too, said her 14 girls of trust!

She was never crazy at all, and it has made us closer- than ever, in aging as

we ran these new worlds, along with this one.

I-Jaylynn- thought- Tell them all about what they cannot understand, they have taken over me, like her with their hex!

Quit stalling- I thought, yet they have my mind, and just get it over with!

Nevertheless, I do not, like- I do not say a word, anything but the feeling of traumatized going through me- of all the one before me- feeling their every emotion- mostly pain and evil. I just delay for her to endure so-o, I can delay even further, with the voices ripping through

me, that is not taking over my mind. Over the fact- I want to take over my mother's place in this world, as it should be, and fight for her as I never did in the past. Though Jaylynn.

Even so, if you could see it as it is, you would not see that at all, they are so much more- yet you can see- in you investigate my mind deep and see when the outside evil all started- slipping in, and that is more than most.

(Remembrance of time formerly)

She beams, as though I just passed the world's easiest test of understanding.

'Really, yet now think about, that Chiaz Naztherth sounds about right, that I would give you, my life?’

Raise your hand, she nods, palms out, moving toward mine, feeling the sparks of link up with memories and transmitting them from one girl to the other.

Lifting my arm unhurriedly, carefully, figured out to evade all bodily contact when she says, 'Now tell me, what do you perceive?’

At once I just was, unsure what she is after with me doing this, then shrugging I say, 'Well, I see pale skin,

long fingers, a freckle or two, nails in serious need of a manicure-this were you?’

Instead, you would see a group of fragments encompassing neutrons, protons, quarks, and electrons. And a young girl's life starting school, and then ever-so moving forward- yet look even closer than that.

And within those little quarks, down to the littlest idea, you would see zilch- but pure vibrating energy moving at a speed slow enough, that it seems hard and solid, and yet, rapidly abundant, that it cannot be seen for what it is- oomph.

As she wrapped her fingers around the staff, she felt a small burst of electricity, a charge that tingled through her wrist and forearm. Ancient magic. Finally, she thought as she swam back out the way she had come in, she would get her revenge on those responsible for her parents' deaths: humans. I did not have to say good-bye. I was just beginning to say hello. I took a deep breath, and I kissed her lips. Lips once full of life, once full of love. Her eyes opened.

Having been an unwilling visitor here often enough, she did not bother to snoop around. Muddy old scrolls and portrait mosaics of her ancestors- were

about as exciting as sand. And just as useful. Instead, she headed directly for her prize. Perched on a stand behind the king’s desk, like a hydra waiting for the ocean current to whisk it away to a new home, stood the royal trident. It looked common, useless. Likewise, in the hands of a merperson of royal descent, it would wield great power.

It just so happened that Chiaz was a merperson of royal descent.

I bet I can renegotiate the streamers later.

Epilogue Deyanira Sanderson slipped through the open doorway to the

king’s office, her heart flutter- kicking despite knowing that the palace guard had retired when Uncle Whelk went to bed a few hours ago.

Still, the thrill of danger coursed through her. It was not fear of getting caught- she would face whatever consequences the king threw her way- likewise excitement over what she was about to do. She had pulled a lot of crazy and daring stunts in her sixteen years, likewise, this was by far the boldest. He mewls, similar this is the biggest imposition ever.

Finally, he says, 'Okay, likewise no streamers on the handlebars. She'd never live down the embarrassment.'

'Deal,' I say as I slip my hand into his and we start digging her out of the theme. 'She's safer than a wake-maker,' he counters.

He has a point.

'Okay,' I say, trying to be diplomatic, 'I'll learn to drive Princess on one condition.'

'Shoot.'

'I get to wear pink I could not help me.'

Not sure- to unbelievably, I narrow my eyes; never-mind the circumstance that she has been studying this stuff for hundreds of years, I feel now lost in small details- of dealing.

'Trust.’ She said to me, enthusiastically.

Fully taken to the subject now, she leans toward me, saying remember is half the battle- isn’t it?

'Seriously, ever- the insignificant person is diverse, and plays a role in all that is remembrances of the past.’

She did not say a word, only her eyes said, the emotion- (transporting- teleporting in a handheld)

Take my hand child, she said in an undertone.

'The whole thing is the same. Items that give the impression dense, like you and I, and this sand that we're sitting on- now, are just a mass of energy vibrating gradually enough to seem hard, while things like spirits and ghosts vibrate so quickly, they're nearly unbearable for most humans to see- yet we can see it.'

~*~

'If you think I’m driving that death trap,’ I say, 'then you’re insane.’

'I see you,’ I say, eager to remind her of all the time I used to spend with my ghostly image coming through.

I take one look at Princess, lying on her side with two trash cans and a mess of garbage piled around her, and cringe.

I laugh. 'You named your flying horse and chariot Princess?’ 'What can I say?’ he teases. 'I call all my favorite things princess.’

'I think I have met her, I think- I know that I have it was Lurleen, before-

the total contrast of what she was remembered for-in this world.’

I investigated this world like a drunk through the past, as Jaylynn, yet ever since, heightened as if compressed, to amplify- the slightest, the lest- to the loftiness of vibrancy.

'Also, that is accurately why- you cannot see you anymore, do you know who you are now?’ She nods- then she and her changed place once more, and she, at last, saw all throw the years back refitted in her mother’s eyes- of Emmah, the war over the hex.

I gaze at the water before us, the swells rolling under the bridge that was standing on so high above, one after another. Endless, never-ending, immortal- like us.

'Or at least I used to, you know, before she overlapped the bridge and moved on- like all the others, I even seen the love for the girl before him too, the true love, of what is wrong- yet ever-so right.'

I want you to be with a girl named- Naddalin, be a girlfriend to her, she is like me in so many ways you will love her- I can see that too- for you. And

she needs a new outlook on life now, and so do you.

'The vibration is moving too wildly. Though some can see past all of that.’

'Now raise your hand again and bring it so close to mine we just nearly touch and strike of bolts.’

Then just like that, the section was over for us both, and it was time to sit down and reflect on all things past. The witch has become my life and has been most of it as well. Then, now, and even in the future.

I did not want to stay away. I couldn’t.’

'Woohoo!’ He shouts, closes the distance between us, and lifts me into his arms, spinning us around. 'I knew it!’

Before I could respond with disbelief- he so obviously did not know if- he sets me down and takes my face in his hands. His lips are on their way to mine when he pulls back. 'Hey, I’m not about to set off another crazy magical bond again, am I?’ Then, as if he just realized something, he says, 'Not that I’m opposed or anything. I just want to be clear about what I’m getting into.’

'No,’ I say, trying to shake my head. 'No more bonds. You’re immune now.’ 'Okay,’ he says. Then he finishes what he started.

His lips on mine feel so soft and warm and…perfect. Without hiding behind the magic of the bond- and with my feelings out in the open- I can recognize the true magic of our kiss. Olivia said once that love is the strongest magic in the world. Now I know he is right.

When he pulls back, his eyes glow with the love I know is shining inside. I am sure my eyes are glowing just as

bright because I can feel the tears of joy sliding down my cheeks.

For several long minutes, we just smiled at each other.

I am sure we look similar stupidly in love teenagers- to Aunt- Rachel and whoever else happens to be watching- likewise, we know the truth. There is nothing stupid about it.

'My motorcycle, I loved it.’

'Now that you’re back,’ Olivia says, slinging an arm around my shoulders and leading me toward the driveway, 'I’m going to teach you to ride the Princess.’

'Princess?’

'For you,’ I admit, every muscle in my heart panicked at the revelation. 'I came back because of you.’

'Yes?’ He asks for his confused look softening with a smile that crinkles at the corners of his eyes.

Willing me not to faint before I can get the words out, I say, 'I love you, Olivia.' I missed the lip gloss,’ I tease. As soon as I say it, I know it is the wrong thing.

This is not the time for joking. Not only do I feel sour inside, likewise the guarded look on 'That’s a lie,’ I confess.

He scowls in confusion. Strang, I reach into my pocket and pull out smoothing from my childhood, that I brought back with me, and looking at it as I do, and playing with it as the same as I did when I was a small girl around the age of five, no more one of the first things, that I bought, after finding a new home, it small and ticks, in my hand, has not been found in years.

Oddly enough it a pocket timepiece, silver in finish ornate engraving- with a gold time-worn train on embossed within the closure, I spin the time- to the last date of time on Earth, and pull the winder to stop it from

sticking, as a reminder of all time past, as it was for me looking at it with childlike memories.

12:37 was the time…

Her attention shifts as the ringing stops. I can hear someone say something on the other end.

Chiaz asks, May I speak with Brody, please-?

There is a pause and then, it is Deyanira-

Holding her hand over the mouthpiece, she says to me, His mother is fetching him- I smile.

Until she adds, you can leave now-

My first thought is to strangle her. Her attention is back on the phone: she would never see it coming. likewise, that would leave Brody heartbroken by an unsevered bond.

I could not do that to him.

Besides, I do not have the energy to do it right.

In the end, I just brush my teeth, take a deep breath, and leave the room. Chaz slams the door behind me. If I ask nicely, Aunt Rachel will get me my line. Or, even better, a cell phone.

Though I can only imagine the cell phone company laughing when I bring in my soaking phone for a replacement.

I should just stick with the landline.

Suppressing the temptation to listen in on her conversation- if she Does not know how to dial a phone, she cannot understand about extensions- I head to my room and hold the door open for Jenny to join me. The traitor that she is, she is stationed outside the bathroom instead of following me-I am the one who feeds you, you know- She gives me a wistful look,

similar she wishes she could be in two places at once, and then turns and presses her nose to the crack under the bathroom door.

- Fine- I swing the door shut behind me.

After retrieving my rain Chiaz pajamas from beneath my pillow and trading them for my towel wrap, I sit down at my desk

and pull-out markers and a blank sheet of paper. Using an exercise, we learned in first-year English, I fold the paper in half lengthwise and prepare to make a pro-and-cons list. I use a purple

marker to draw a line down the middle. Then I title each column and begin filling them in. Accept Saylin’s Proposal to Reject Saylin’s...

Proposal Duty Love...

Dad Aunt Rachel... My kingdom Me Legacy Future

Living up to my Discover new potential Responsibility Dedication... The people of LASSINIA Olivia Leading my people underwater-

Protecting my people from above- I am not sure what I had hoped to accomplish by making this list.

I thought one side of the decision would far outweigh the other and I would not have to fret about it anymore.

The truth is there are valid reasons for me to make either choice.

The only difference is- it is a choice I have already made. I am giving up my life and living on land, living with my human half, and forging a future with the boy I love.

Without another thought, I crumple the list and toss it into the trash. That is the end of that mental debate.

Then why do I still feel so adrift?

By lunch the next day, Chiaz and Brody are back in each other's laps. By Wednesday afternoon I am ready to throw them both back into

the ocean. If only the waters of south Florida were chilly enough to cool them off.

When I stomp through the kitchen door after school and find them sharing one of the dining chairs, I stomp right on through to the living room before flinging my backpack to the ground.

I know this is what I wanted to happen, likewise Chiaz Naztherth it all must be so in- my- face?

- Something wrong-? Saylin asks.

I glance- okay, glare- at the armchair where he has been spending all his time since he got here on Monday. He has mentioned his proposal a couple of times, likewise, he has not been pushing the issue.

- No, I snap-I mean, yes. Not really. I just-I shake my head.

- I do not need to see my baby cousin making all lovey-dovey with my ex-crush- I flop on the couch, jerk open the zipper on my bag, and pull out my SAT prep guide. Flipping it open to the next

sample test, I slam it on the coffee table and slide it down onto the floor to begin.

- You have been spending a lot of your time with that book, Saylin Observes-May I ask why-? - Because, I explain, trying to scan the rules for the first section, even though I should have them memorized by now, the test is on Saturday and if I do not do well, then I will not get into college because my grades have been pitiful because until three weeks ago, I thought I did not need to worry about a future on land because I was going to become a mer queen and spend my years ruling over LASSINIA

instead of studying literature and American Government-

A long silence fills the room after my mini rant.

Finally, Saylin laughs and says,

- Now tell me your true feelings-

I slump-I know it is not the most important thing in the world, I admit.

Things like war, famine, and ocean warming come to mind.

- likewise, if I want to protect the oceans in an official, scientific capacity, then I need higher education.

I cannot become a marine biologist without at least a college degree-

- You can help the oceans in another way, he says quietly.

I guess I should be thankful he has been quiet if he has.

He has been patiently waiting for the right moment. Now it is not that moment.

- Tell me why- I lay my pencil down in the open seam of the study guide- Why do you think this is such a great idea-?

- I told you why-

- You told me a reason, I argue- likewise I do not think you have told me your reason- Lurleen, Saylin says, sinking onto the floor next to me, you are the best hope for LASSINIA’s future.

For the future freedom of all the mer kingdoms.

With our forces united, we will be able to enact positive change-

- This is everything you said before-

And everything that tugged at the lifetime of duty that Dad trained into me.

likewise, something is missing-

You have another reason. I can sense it-

- You are wrong, he says with another laugh-I have been raised to honor duty before all else, just like you. I can imagine no better way to fulfill our duties than by joining our kingdoms for the greater good-

- I just do not think I can-

- You know that is why my father stopped speaking to you, right?

- What -? I jerk back-No. Why-?

- King Whelk wanted to enter us into an arranged marriage,

Saylin explains-My father disagreed. He wanted me to seek out my true love, my true mermate. When your father insisted, my severe relations.

- That's impossible- I shake my head, not able to wrap my mind around the idea of Dad wanting to sign my future away on a piece of paper. It seems so un-similar to him-It is not; Saylin Says-This is another reason my plan is a good one.

It is what your father has wanted all along- His gaze drifts toward the front door, likewise I can tell he is not seeing anything-As difficult as it is for me to admit, my father was wrong in this. Our

union can only be for the best of both our kingdoms-

He makes it seem so tempting. The fact that I am even considering the possibility is ridiculous. likewise, similar we have always said- What if-?

- What if, Saylin says, jumping on my opening, we bonded and-

- What if who bonded?

- Olivia! -I jump at the sound of his voice. He walks into the living

room with a dark look on his face. And no wonder if he heard what Saylin and I were talking about.

- I thought you were at work-? I ask, hopefully not sounding- or looking- guilty.

- I was, he says flat there is a tropical storm coming in, so they closed the lumberyard- He throws Saylin a dark look-What if who bonded-? - It is just a game we used to play as guppies, I explain before Saylin can respond. He could only make the situation worse.

- One of us starts a what- if, and then we keep going down that path, alternating what-ifs until we get to a conclusion. Or we start laughing too hard to continue-

- A game, Olivia Echoes-So, in what- if are the two of you bonded-?

- It is just a-

Saylin interrupts-I commented on how funny it would be if we had bonded as children, he lies-We almost shared the first kiss once or twice, likewise, Lurleen was always the levelheaded one- He grins at me.

- Spurned my every advance-

I throw Saylin a grateful smile. Not that he and I were doing anything wrong, likewise still. My relationship with Olivia- our official boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, anyway- is still new. I do not

want him to worry over something that would never happen.

Similar Saylin said I am too levelheaded to do anything so impulsive. Saylin, sensing the almost tangible tension in the room, stands, clears his throat, and excuses himself to the kitchen. Seconds later, he is fleeing the smooch fest he found there upstairs. Olivia, who has been standing, rigid and acting as the epicenter of all that anxiety, asks, what was that about?

- Nothing. I told you, we just-

- Save it, he says, cutting me off-I know you better than anyone. I can tell when you are lying to me-

- It is not a lie- Not really. We were playing a game and, even though for half a second, I might have sort of thought about considering the idea, I was not serious. I insist We were playing a game.

He looks at me for a minute, studying, trying to see through my words to decide if I am Saying the truth.

Finally, he closes his eyes and shakes his head-Yeah, sorry. It has been a long day- I cross the room and wrap my

arms around his waist -It has been a long month.

He gives me a quick hug and then leans back, nodding at the open study guide on the table-You want some help-?

- Of course, I say, grasping at the safe topic of my SAT prep. As he settles, cross-legged, on the floor across the table, I ask, are you going to distract me by playing footsie-?

- Absolutely, princess, he says with a wink.

- Then I will not remember a thing-

- It is a samurai training technique, he teases, spinning the test prep book toward him-I distract you as much as possible right now- He slides the book into his lap-And you will learn how to test through anything- Samurai, huh-? I tease back, relieved to return to our relaxed posit ions-We will not get anything done-

He wins again and then gets down to business, reading the first question aloud.

My good humor evaporates as I focus on trying to figure out the parallel relationship between dog and quadruped.

- I am going to fail-

- You are not going to fail, Shannen replies patiently- you cannot fail the SATs- She signals a left turn, checks both ways, and then pulls out onto the street in front of the school. Her wipers swish back and forth against the tropical downpour… The worst you can get on each section is a two hundred, I think, likewise, they do not assign letter grades-

- Fine, I whine-I am going to get two hundred-

- You will not- She spares me a glance.

- You will do well in the reading and writing sections-

With a groan, I drop my head into my hands, knocking it against the dashboard on the way. I just groan again and sink deeper into my freak-out. I have not had enough time to prepare. I have wasted too much of what time I did have. And I am going to have a complete mental meltdown tomorrow when the test begins.

I will be lucky if I can speak in complete sentences at my interview after.

- The test is in the morning, I complain-I only have sixteen more hours to cram in some studying-

Shannen pulls to a complete stop before proceeding onto my street.

- No.

No, more cramming, she says- There have been countless studies that show the more you try to learn in the last few hours before an exam, the less you retain-

- Really-?

- In fact, she says, a slightly smug smile on her face, they suggest that it will even make you forget things you already know-

- Oh, no, I cry-Then no more studying-

- No more studying, Shannen agrees.

Well, at least that gives me a little more freedom for my Friday night. I was already bummed because Olivia had to run errands for his mom and could not give me a ride home- not that I mind riding with Shannen, it has just become a routine for Olivia and me. The thought of spending the whole night with my nose buried in a study guide was just sad. At least now maybe Shannen and I can enjoy

an evening of board games and well- likewise tired popcorn.

- Wait for a second, I say as she speeds past my house- You missed my turn-

- I thought we could swing by the grocery store and get some caramels- She steers onto Seaview's main shopping street -Ever have caramel corn-?

- No, I say, intrigued-Is it good-?

- It is amazing, she says, pulling into the store parking lot. Which happens to be right next to Mushu Sushi, my favorite land-based sushi restaurant. I

give their red-lacquered doors a yearning glance.

- Want to grab dinner first -? Shannen asks.

Sushi is not her favorite, so I know she must have seen my longing look.

- Nah, I say, trying to be a good friend.

- It is okay- The OPEN sign next to their front door is dark.

- Besides, looks similar they are closed-

- Let us check to make sure. I would not say no to some edamame, Shannen says, jumping out of the car and dashing toward the restaurant to escape the rain.

- Okay- I shrug and follow her, never one to turn down a plateful of sushi goodness. I move slowly, letting the water cover me with its soothing energy. By the time I reach the awning, I look a little bedraggled, likewise I feel wonderful.

Despite the dark sign, Mushu’s front door swings open easily when Shannen pushes. She throws me a

mischievous smile before walking in, holding the door open behind her.

Curious, I follow her inside.

- Surprise!!!-

Shouts bombard me from all directions.

I slam my palm against my chest before my heart can beat its way out - Holy banana fish, you guys!

- Happy birthday, Shannen says, handing me a box wrapped with yellow paper and curling upon the curl of orange ribbon. I take the box, still in shock and still staring around the room at everyone

gathered in the tiny entryway. Besides- Shannen, Aunt Rachel is there, beaming, and Olivia, of course.

He has that boy- did- we- get- you look on his face, and that makes me smile more than anything.

Next, to him, Brody and Chiaz are joined at the hip, and little ways to the side, Saylin is lounging against the wall, which is paneled with narrow strips of very redwood.

- We knew you could not be here on your actual birthday, Aunt Rachel explains, so we thought we would surprise you with an early party- The host

arrives at her podium, grabs a stack of menus, and leads us to the private dining room in the back.

Someone has transformed it into an underwater dream.

- This is just-I take in all the decorations- streamers curling down from the ribbon in half a dozen shades of blue and green; a big party- store cutouts of starfish, seahorses, and tropical fish; and tiny twinkling blue and green lights circling the room. My eyes tear, and the emotion tightens around my throat. I take a quick breath to regain my control before saying, Magical.

Thank you- Realizing that this could not have been the effort of just one or two of my friends and family, I add, Everyone- What are we waiting for-? Olivia asks, rubbing his palms together let us eat-

He holds out the chair at the head of the table, motioning for me to sit there.

When I do, he takes the seat to my right.

Everyone fills in around the table, and the waiter starts bringing in sushi.

At of the cone-shaped shrimp tempura and California temaki.

A lovely platter of New York and Philadelphia making.

This is what birthday bliss is all about.

When the waiter pops his head in to see if we want more, everyone mewls. I exchange a look along the length of the table with Saylin- the only person at the table who could keep up with me when it comes to sushi consumption- and we share the same likes in dishes, and feelings- like the- I am- so- full look.

- I could not eat another morsel, I announce.

Sounds of agreement come from everyone at the table. The waiter nods and disappears.

- Now, Aunt Rachel says, reaching beneath her seat and pulling out an exceedingly small box wrapped in homemade purple paper, it is time for presents-

Everyone cheers and I blush. This is my least favorite part of human birthdays.

I get so embarrassed. Under the sea, a birthday is just a celebration, not a gift-giving occasion. Getting gifts is great, likewise, I get squirmy under the

spotlight, everyone watching while you carefully- or carelessly- open your package.

Likewise, as a full-time land resident, I will just have to get over it.

Aunt Rachel sets her gift in front of her and says-

- I would like to save mine for last if that is okay-

- Open mine first, Shannen says, nodding at the yellow- and- orange package next to my water glass.

- Okay- I smile as I reach for the box.

- There is a tradition, Aunt Rachel explains to Chiaz and Saylin since they do not know, that if the birthday girl tears the wrapping paper on her first present, she gets as many spankings as she is old- Being fully aware of this tradition- and Aunt Rachel’s determination to uphold it- I use my fingernail to slit the tape securing the yellow wrapping paper. In seconds, I unwrapped the gift and handed the paper to Aunt Rachel for inspection.

- Sadly, Aunt Rachel says with a mock frown, Lurleen has managed to avoid getting spanked for four birthdays running-

Everyone laughs. I take the opportunity of their distraction to open the white box that contains Shannen's gift. Inside, on a bed of yellow tissue paper, is a bright orange calculator with yellow keys. I lift it out and play with a few of the likewise tons.

- It is for the SATs tomorrow, Shannen explains.

- It is perfect, I say, pushing out of my chair and hugging her every time, I must solve a math problem, I will think of you. It will help me focus more- Shannen beams.

- Mine next, Chiaz says, passing an unwrapped box down the table.

Sinking back into my chair, I took the box. This is momentous. She is participating in a human ritual. It must be a sign of progress, right?

I give Chiaz a small smile before pulling off the lid.

I gasp.

- I just thought, she says, that since you made one for Olivia, you'd similar one, too- Chiaz, I say, full of emotion as I pull out the inch- wide sapphire blue sand dollar-It is beautiful- I

hold up the necklace for everyone to see. Olivia reaches beneath his black

T-shirt and pulls out the matching necklace I made for him just a few weeks ago. The smile he gives me might seem perfectly ordinary, likewise, it is not. It says, There’s hope for Chiaz yet.

I completely agree.

- Thank you, Deyanira, I say sincerely-I cannot imagine a more perfect gift - She rolls her eyes and shrugs as if my compliment means nothing. I can tell she is proud of herself. Besides, with her powers revoked, she cannot flash- freeze

sand dollars anymore. She either planned this ahead of time or asked for help.

The girl may pretend similarly she Does not care about anyone likewise herself; she is proving that is not true. In many ways.

Brody easily an envelope-Now mine-

I rip open the top of the plain brown envelope, curious as to what kind of presence might be in here. When I pull out a sheet of paper and read the contents, I realize what his gift is.

- No way, I say, rereading the letter-Are you serious-? - As Olympic gold-

- What-? Shannen asks.

Aunt Rachel asks, what is it-? I cleared my throat and read the letter.

- Dear Teachers. The following students will be absent from class on Thursday and Friday to attend the boys' state swimming championships: Brody Bennett, Kevin Velasquez, mind Flynn, and team manager Lurleen Sanderson. Please gather their homework assignments so they may complete them on time. If you have any questions, please call my office. Coach Hill.

'You won't lose me,' I replied, playfully punching him in the arm.

'Come on,’ he said, setting his chewing gum on the railing and then flicking it into the waves. 'Let us play a couple of games of Alien Attack at my house.’

'No thanks,’ I said, as we began walking back to the beach. 'I don’t feel like vaporizing green creatures.’

'Don’t feel like zapping aliens?’ Chainsaw said, stopping in his tracks.

'Damn! I’ve already lost you!’- Beach and Tide!

'Perfect timing!’ Wave said, jumping off Bubbles and tying her

leash to coral.

'I have to take my potion,’ I whispered adamantly. 'I can’t stay!’

'Sure, you can,’ Beach said, grabbing my hand and helping me off.

'It’s party time, urchin baby,’ Beach said, bumping into me and accidentally knocking my purse into the sea.

'My purse!’ I screamed, darting after my precious potion as it floated away. The beach beat me to it and started for the door.

'I need that!’ I hollered.

'Why? Are you paying? I like a woman who’s in charge!’ And he disappeared into the restaurant.

I followed him through a massive hole in the hull which had caused the ship to sink. The interior was decorated with red vinyl chairs and silver metal tables, and strings of glow fish and fluorescent lights draped the ceiling. Servers wore white sailor hats and navy ties.

'Beach’s birthday party is tomorrow,’ Wave said, grabbing my arm and plopping me down beside him.

I grabbed my purse back.

'You'll be there?' Beach asked, nudging me.

'Of course, she will,' Wave answered, cuddling next to Tide.

'My mom needs me at home,' I announced.

The server brought an appetizer of candied mussels and asked for our drink orders.

'Frog juice,' Wave said.' Since when you listen.

'We're having company,' I said.

'Make that two frog juices!' Wave ordered.

I gazed out the porthole at Bubbles, reluctantly leashed to the pole. Like her, I could not break free.

Wave tied her backpack to her chair so it would not float away, but I desperately clung to my purse. She was cuddling with Tide; Beach was almost sitting on my lap. I wondered where the Earth man was.

I wear your silver heart close to my own. Was he wearing it right now? I stared at my watch.

'It’s been lovely, but I have tons of homework,’ I said, rising.

'Bored already?’ Beach asked. 'Let us bop!’

He grabbed my arm, dropped a half-eaten mussel back in the shell basket, and pulled me to the dance floor at the stern of the ship. Music was piped in through sponge speakers that hung from the ship’s walls. A wave machine gently undulated to the rhythm of the dance floor water, making couples rock into each other. Twirling lasers flashed red sharks, yellow seahorses, and purple hearts. Couples jammed above and below us, working off the worries of an unruly hair day. My purse dangled helplessly as Beach spun me around.

'You’re a great dancer!’ Beach smiled, as a couple suddenly did a wild corkscrew spin over our heads, almost crashing into us. 'I bet that’s not all you’re Beach kissing me. He was tasty, but something was missing in his kiss. Love?

And that was not all that was missing. I pushed him away and reached for my abalone purse. But it was not on my shoulder!

'My purse! My purse! It’s gone!’ I shouted.

'It’s okay. I’m paying!’

Suddenly the water felt as thick as mud. I was moving in slow motion as I pushed through the sea of dancers. I swam toward the ceiling, dove back to the floor. I shouted to the DJ, but he just shook his head. I scoured every table on the way back to Wave and Tide.

'Wave, I lost my purse!' I panicked.

'Aren't the Mud Rakers glacial?' she said, bopping her head and sipping her imported frog juice.

'My purse! It has my new purchase!' I shouted at her.

'We'll get you another,' she said, almost relieved.

'Someone might mistake my medicine for a Shark Attack and wake up with two legs!' I said, glaring at her.

'Oh!' she exclaimed.

Wave, Tide, Beach, and I went off in separate directions: Beach back to the dance floor, Wave to the Deflated, I swam back to our table. My search party was not anywhere in sight. Had I lost them, too?

'Is this it?' Tide called, hanging at the host counter, holding my abalone treasure.

I swam over to him, relieved. But it felt lighter. I quickly opened it. It was empty!

My heart sank. Even Wave looked frazzled when she returned from her search.

'Oh, no!' she shouted, pointing to a preteen merscout sitting at a table with his troops, about to open the cork from my bottle. He leaned his head back, ready to gulp the potion down his throat.

'You're too young for this!' I said, grabbing it out of his hand.

'I didn't know! Do not tell our troop leader! Okay?' He begged.

I held the bottle tightly to my chest and made my getaway through the ship’s hole.

'Wait for me!’ Wave said, climbing onto Bubbles.

'So, I’ll see you tomorrow night at my party?’ Beach called.

'She wouldn’t miss it for the world,’ Wave answered as we sped away.

-An abandoned cave near to my home. I had fixed it up with sea lettuce curtains, portraits of Earthers I had found at an open-water market, and hot- pink clay chairs. Shelves were adorned with rusty Earthen coins, a bright orange

Earthen diving fin, a black high-heeled shoe, a Beatles' Abbey Road compact disc, Panasonic batteries, and a carving of my parents at their wedding, dressed in white, kissing beneath a water Lurleen patch. I used my hideout to listen to music, read teen mags, or fantasize about an Earthen life when I wanted to be alone. Only Wave knew of its existence.

'Here goes!' I said, eyeing the potion.

'Why don't you just hang it on the wall with your other treasures,' Wave suggested.

'I don’t have a choice,’ I said, trying to pry the cork off.

The wave urgently stopped my hand. 'What happens if Madame Pearl is wrong? What happens if you grow two heads instead of two legs?’

'Then I’ll be that much smarter!’

'You don’t know what that stuff can do. You could grow two fins!’

she said, pulling it back.

'Then I’ll join the sea circus,’ I said, pulling it toward me.

'You could die!’ she exclaimed. 'Lilly, you could die!’

I had never really thought of that. It was my nature.

Act now, think later. Talk back to my parents to think about it in my room.

Cut class-reflect in my hideout. Save an Earther now consider the consequences later. This was one time I should think before I acted.

'I won’t let you die!’ Wave said, jerking the bottle toward her.

But suddenly the old glass bottle broke-the jagged bottom remained clenched in my hand while Wave held the broken neck. Its obnoxious contents oozed into the sea. We were both

shocked, as the brown liquid slowly floated before our eyes.

There was only one thing to do. I swam after the potion and swallowed as much as I could before it diluted completely. It tasted as disgusting as it looked, and it took all my effort to keep it down.

'No!' Wave shrieked, yanking me away from the potion as I struggled to cup more into my mouth.

'Let go!' I cried.

I continued swallowing the potion until I could see or smell no more.

As I wiped gooey droplets from my mouth, I fell into a coughing fit.

'Are you okay?’ she cried. 'I’ll call a doctor!’

'No-’ I said, through coughs. 'I’m all right.’

The sludge left a muddy tingling sensation in my I stared up at the clock. Seconds became minutes. I finally sat down. The tension was too great, and I pulled out the music magazine and flipped through the pages. I scrubbed my teeth in the bathroom. I straightened my battery collection. Wave sat on a wooden Earthen chair chewing her nails. I love earthen

things now in this world we live in… all the underworlds come together.

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'You don’t know what that stuff can do. You could grow two fins!’

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'Look, I’m still a mermaid!’ I exclaimed an hour later.

'Satisfied?’

'I knew that an old woman was a crackpot!’ Wave sighed, hugging me.

'How could we be friends if you didn’t live in the water anymore?’

'I gave away my crystal collection! I could have bought front row tickets to the Psychedelic Sponges concert.’

'Or a backstage pass and autographed picture,’ she teased.

'I’m going back tomorrow to demand a refund.’

'Think of it as a lesson,’ she tried to comfort. 'Mermaids belong in the ocean.’

'And charlatans belong in the Underworld. Oh… I don’t feel so well,’ I moaned, as we rode Bubbles back to my house.

Sports Illustrated swimsuit poster then tore it from my wall.

Who needed a supermodel to pine over? That was kid stuff! Magazine girls required hours of professional- makeup and pea-sized dinners. I had something real, even if it had only lasted a moment, a magical kiss from a dream girl I would never see again. I switched off my desk lamp and lay on my bed, wondering if she would ever find the ad, ever show up at

the football field, if I ever saw her again. I reflected on her pink lips, her- sparkling smile, and caressed the necklace in my hand, wishing it were her.

I lay awake wondering about Earth's life. We knew that Earthlings had legs, and we had fins. Similar, but different. But how different- could they really be on the inside?

-And not a rancid-tasting potion that costs a crystal fortune. But it would have been best if it had not worked. Earth was too dangerous, as Oscillate and everybody else believed.

I closed my eyes, waiting for sleep, thankful that Madame Pearl was an impostor, and wondered how I was going to tell my mother I had lost my great-grandfather's silver necklace.

A.M. I stood by the south goalpost. This was one event I did not want to be late for. Not that my life was any big deal.

Since my mom left my father and me when I was a kid, our house ceased being a home. I found peace only when riding- the waves. I changed my hair color with my changing moods-to lift me out of a funk or cover up the fact I was in one.

But today I sported blue spikes for a different reason, this time in celebration- in honor of the sea where we met.

Because this morning was different. I awoke with a swelling of my being, that went beyond my usual swellings! It was a swelling of emotion, a connection to life I had never felt before. I noticed Star Wars or a year's subscription to Wipeout.

But most of all, I felt a connection to her, even though I did not know her name, and had never heard her voice. Was I obsessed or possessed? If Chainsaw

caught wind of my innermost thoughts and feelings, he would punch me out for sure. I wanted to give her flowers, buy her candy, serenade her underneath a balcony, write her poetry, carve her initials in a tree. It is not every day that someone breathes life into you. And her breath seemed purer than any I had ever known.

I wigged out-wildly wiggling two skinny legs and ten tiny toes! I had sold my crystal seahorse collection for these legs, but the reality was terrifying. I was cold, naked, and alone. Why hadn't Madame Pearl told me I would need Earthen clothes? Suddenly the sun

seemed to pulsate, the sky started to spin back and forth, and the day turned to night.

'This isn’t a nude beach!’ a woman’s voice called.

'Madame Pearl?’ I whispered, opening my eyes and gasping- in the crisp air.

'Put your clothes on!’ yelled a wrinkled Earth lady wearing a bright purple hat.

Flustered and confused, I spied a yellow beach towel lying a few inches from me. I grabbed it and wrapped it around my body. Not satisfied, Earth lady

pointed to a pile of clothes lying next to a-backpack.

- I do not get it, Shannen says.

Chiaz asks, What's the gift -? So, excited I might just burst, my gaze meets Brody’s across the table-I get to go to State- The silence around the table seems to say, and-?

Eight-fifteen. I mashed my sweaty palms against my jeans. Eight thirty- two. I unraveled a stick of Wrigley’s. Eight forty- five. I kicked an empty Coke can. Nine o’clock. I leaned pessimistically against the goalpost.

The bell rang, beckoning me to arrive on time for U.S. history. I slung my backpack over my shoulder and looked at the desolate field. My lifeguard was a late sleeper. My ad should have read 3:30 P.M. I was just a complete idiot.

I waited until nine-fifteen, then I waited until nine-thirty.

The gym class began running its way around the track. I sauntered up to the fifty-yard line and, dejected, made my way inside the building, late for the first bell.

-this must just be a dream.

And then I remembered Madame Pearl. I sat up and got the shock of my life, for dangling from the 'Madame Pearl!’ I screamed in an Earthen voice. 'Madame!’

- Managers never get to go to the State, I explain since it is usually just the coach and a couple of swimmers. This is- I shake my head at Brody- awesome. Thank you.

In my three years as swim team manager, it has always been a bittersweet end to the season- having to hang up my record book while a handful of swimmers

got to travel to Orlando for the state meet.

It is awesome that, as a senior, I will get to go, too.

Brody just earned triple points. Not only for getting me the letter, likewise and for knowing how much it would mean to me.

He was not as self-absorbed as I thought.

This gift- getting the thing is worth the torture.

I look around expectantly, wondering whose gift will wow me next.

Without saying a word, Olivia pulls a small box from the inside pocket of his jacket. He slides it across the red tablecloth.

My eyes meet his as I pick up the box and pull off the red ribbon. It feels similar we have not had much time together as a boyfriend-girlfriend since I came back, likewise, the look in his eyes is all I need to see the promise of a long future between us.

I absently lift off the lid and reach inside. My fingers curl around a cold metal object.

Glancing down, I find a starfish-shaped silver key ring.

- It is beautiful, I whisper.

He leans close-Turn it over- on the back, inscribed in a delicately curving script, are the words Forever, princess. I love you.

Tears instantly filled my eyes.

- I love you, too, I mouth- what-? Shannen demands, reaching across the table to take the starfish. When she reads the inscription, she is struck voiceless.

The keyring makes the rounds of the table, eliciting shrugs from the boys

and sighs from the girls. When it makes its way back to my palm, I clutch it close to my heart.

- Thank you, I say, though words cannot entirely express what I am feeling.

- After that, Aunt Rachel announces, it seems apropos to give you my gift next-

She lifts the flecked purple package off the table and hands it to me.

Her eyes are wide with pride and expectation as I peel off the wrapping. It is quite a small box with hardly any weight on it. Is it a gift card? I could use a trip to the mall for some summer beach

staples. Flip- flops, bikinis, tank tops. I am always up for a shopping spree.

Likewise, when I pull the lid off the box, it is not a gift card resting on the tie-dyed pink- and- purple tissue. It is a key.

I do not get it. I already have a key to the house, both front and back doors. There are not any other locks in my life, except for the combination of my locker at school. No key required.

And it is not exactly shaped like a house key.

- What's it for? I ask.

Olivia smiles, taking the key and inspecting it similarly to what he has never seen

it before, likewise, I get the feeling he has-A Toyota Corolla, if I had to guess- Aunt Rachel nods.

- A car-? I gasp.

- Your father and I agreed, she says, that you will need your transportation once you begin college.

...?...

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life, except for the combination of my locker at school. No key required.

And it is not exactly shaped like a house key.

- What's it for? I ask.

Olivia smiles, taking the key and inspecting it similarly, he has never seen it before, likewise, I get the feeling he has-A Toyota Corolla, if I had to guess-Aunt Rachel nods.

- A car-? I gasp.

- Your father and I agreed, she says,

- that you will need your transportation once you begin college.

6

Unlike her, I know the price, the dire significances the slightest skin-on-skin contact can bring, being with a girl- and that was the next step, with her and Naddalin, and what she did not know would not hurt her, would it, underhandly, I was back in her too. Therefore, I have been avoiding her touch altogether, and scenes the days where she left me in her mind for good, and the good of us both- it was all part of a plan of meant to be.

The next day, picking up where we left off, I hesitated, filling my palm with sand, unwilling to do it.

~*~

'To my Naddalin. I have been thinking about how I could tell you how much you mean to me. I evoke when I first started to fall in love with you like it was last night, yet it was much longer than that or, so it feels too.

- And-

Lying naked beside you in that tiny room- it suddenly hit me… that I was part of this whole larger thing. Just like our parents-Just like-or our paternities.

Previously, I was just living my life like I knew the whole lot-And unexpectedly this bright light hit me and woke me up.

That light was you, to me, I cannot believe it has already been, 20 years since you confused me, with your love. And still, to this day, every day you make me feel like the girl I was... How lucky am I that I met you 20 years ago?’ 'Dear sweet little Melisa, thank you so much for my lorry. I love the color, and I play with it every day.’ 'What a truly lovely bride she would have been, and what a gorgeous bride she would have been if she were truly inside herself; when you first turned on the lights and

we started this quest composed. Happy bicentenary-to us…-my love, I will get you to love me once more.

My friend till the end if that is even a thing. 'Naddalin was my best friend-There wasn’t a dry eye in the house, when she passed in war, not one, so young and most inane- in always even sexual, especially that, is the saddest thing. We are so proud of you, making the trip to this new world.’ 'She served our country with honor and dignity; they say in headlines. I am grateful I was able to fight alongside her; said the girls she got the closest to self-conscious. She will live

always in my heart, was also in the headlines.’

Likewise, the truth is a scary thing. Especially when it leaves you completely vulnerable. This is it; I think. The decisive moment. Literally. Like- Like, 'What changed your mind?’ Even more mesmerizing paraphernalia today. Who knew you could rhyme so many words, in a story, I was looking back over my first story, it was a day of remembering all things past?

It reminded me of someone polished. In a way, it was always me, though Nevaeh. Now it reminds me of

someone formal. I was always that too, she thought aloud. Sad songs help me… think of all things earlier.

(The same was Marcella, think- the same things, in her world as Nevaeh.

'Why?’

'Why?’ I repeat.

'Why did you come back?’ His eyes are completely guarded.

Marcella- (Play a melancholy song, she asked the unfeeling device, in the wall. When you know, you are going to die or feel like you are dying inside you play melancholy songs- why she asked the

unfeeling wall unit. (A state of Mind- it replied.)

Check out all your favorite new products. - Delete, she had to say audibly to everyone as a command. E-mail from Amy, Jenny, Sam, Kate, one from her, and she too; a bunch of people over this weekend, for lunch and meetings. Let us all go together and reminisce. I miss you; I need you; I want you…? Check e-mails, for me and read them aloud, 1,069, and the chanting started. I mean, not the sad, mopey you. The old, fun you. Let us get her out and play like there is no tomorrow.

Give me a shout and fall to the floor. Love, Amy, love him love her, not yes, not no, or go-go- and hell no. Respond later, I said to most if not all, feeling melancholy, about life, as if lingering in another is an illness- that I have never met. E-mail from The Times. - Delete, I SAY! - Next!!!

World trade deal stalled as talks break down- YOUR ASKED TO BE THERE. - Next, I SCREAM Having A meltdown, AS IF MY MIND WAS NOT MY OWN, and the mind was overloaded with thoughts of what has become of this new world, already. Sexy daytime star Ashly Kimberly reveals provocative nude

pregnancy photos and their flickering in front of her without request given. (That is a lot of women- with a baby inside there…)

-Ha-ha-ha. It is not funny, do not laugh, were taking this far too fast… '-Are we?’ She questioned oddly.

The TV is on programs like- The following are an adult female, cannot sleep- feet kicking even, - Are you sure? Do you want to terminate? The girl device asked! I do not know, it is extremely dangerous, to see things like this her mind raced… Do not, ha, ha. Do not. Rabbit time- she thought. Come and

spoon me, Rebecca, (Rebecca, Turner was a new girlfriend of 3 days.) 'I’m going to freak you.’

-And want to have some fun- all knotty. 'Ugh,’ I say- in disbelief of the content, crammed into my eyes, unwillingly. I had a dreadful day at work, and I cannot sleep. Um-hum she said, snorting in snoozes. - Is there anybody out there that can talk, I thought and then I heard her in my head.

'Hi.’

'I’m here alone-too.’ '-And I can’t sleep also.’ 'Who’s out there, she jumped into her bed, yet there was nothing in the

darkroom other than the girl next to her, holding her pillow tightly.' I’m back.’ I just cannot get enough of looking at him, of feeling him. All the parts of me that have felt empty for the last few days are suddenly flooded with him. With his strength and his pride and his big Caribbean blue eyes that always remind me of home. Just as he will always feel similar home. 'I decided to come back.’

'I love you, Dad.’

'And I love you, daughter.’ He gives me one last squeeze before holding me away from him. 'Now, would you go after Olivia already? I have had more of

your tear- sparkled eyes than a merman can handle. The next time you visit, I want to see you as happy as you can be.'

Now that is a royal edict that I will gladly fulfill.

When the roar of Olivia's flying horse and chariot echoes through the neighborhood, I am sitting on his front porch. Aunt Rachel is spying on me from the living room window- I have never seen her so excited as when I walked back into her kitchen. After a dozen minutes of smiles and hugs and happy tears- and Jenny happily lapping at my toes- I told her why I had decided to return. She

quickly shoved me out of the front door and told me to wait for Olivia to get home from school.

I love her, likewise, the woman can be a little pushy.

Olivia still has not noticed me when he turns his bike into the driveway - and heads for the back. As he coasts past the porch, he turns and stares wide-eyed at me.

Likewise, he Does not stop his bike. The next thing I know, he is coasted out of sight, and I hear a flying horse and chariot crashing into something- the two

metal garbage cans that Jenny is so fond of scavenging.

I jump to my feet, likewise before I can ‘round the corner to make sure he’s okay, he’s standing there- right there in front of me- and it’s all I can do not to fling my arms around his neck and kiss him silly.

He does not look excited, though. He looks… suspicious.

The stormy look on his face holds me back.

'Savannah?’ He asks as if he cannot quite believe it.

It has only been a week.

Likewise, I know what he means.

Feeling a little self-conscious, now that I must speak, I wave similarly to a dork and say, 'Hi.’

Oh, brilliant, Savannah. Frogging brilliant.

'What are you-?’ He shakes his head. 'I thought you were staying. Your aunt said-'

Therefore, he is always felt more like a dad than a king. What royal daughter could ask for more?

'Secondly,’ he continues, hopefully, unaware of my sad thoughts, 'neither your mother nor I would never want you to put your royal duty before something as personal as love. We want more for you.’

That night- not sharing this bed, but hogging it all for herself, along with all the blankets. 'I’m in bed next to you, to the girl in her mind said, spine-chillingly.’ 'I’m glad you can’t sleep, and the voice got even stronger. Yet I have not heard my ears by the mind, even if you were, I must wake you up-

-From the inside she said, I and do that too- and move you to places you have not made you- walk and talk alike. ‘’Heh, yes.’ 'I am, um, half asleep. Maybe it’s all a dream…’

Chiaz eyes widen innocently. Saylin just smiles- No, he agrees-It was not-

- Then why don’t we take this into the kitchen, I suggest so we can talk over a plate of Aunt Rachel’s white- chocolate macadamia- nut cookies-?

- Count me out, Chiaz says, heading for the stairs in what almost seems like a desperate retreat -I need

another bath- She has gone before I can reply.

Similarly, she cannot wait to get away from me.

Whatever. I am not the cause of her problems- I am trying to help solve them.

- Guess it is just the two of us then, I say to Saylin with a smile-More cookie for me- I wave him into a chair at the dining table while I arrange a nice stack of cookies on a plate. I pour a glass of milk each and then take the table to the table. I have consumed two milk-soaked cookies before I feel ready to talk.

- So, I begin, why are you in Seaview-?

He swallows the last of his third cookies.

- What if-

- What if- I sigh. This is what I am afraid of-I cannot stop- thinking about it, Lurleen, he says, sliding from his chair across the table to the one next to me- Since our conversation in LASSINIA I am consumed with the idea of our what- if- I have been thinking about it too.

Especially considering what is going on with Chiaz. The thought has crossed my mind that, if the mer world

were not a secret, precautions might have been in place and Chiaz parents might never have died.

Things would be so different right now.

Sadly, the other risks and losses far outweigh that potential gain.

He gets up and starts pacing. I have never seen Saylin in trapped form, and I wonder briefly what his legs look similar under his pants.

- I am tired of hiding in the ocean- He stops behind a chair and grabs the back with both hands.

- I want to tell the world- the whole world- who and what I am... You know that is not possible, I argue, even if I wish it were-It is not responsible. Think of how much merfolk would be put at risk- That's melodramatic, he returns.

- There will be somewhat of adjustment, to be sure, likewise, I believe that terrapins and merfolk can coexist peacefully-

I shake my head slowly, sadly-I do not-

- I think you believe it too- He drops back into the chair and lays his

hand over mine-You would not be living on land if you did not-

- I-a, yes, the idea is too big; my mind is swimming.

- Even if I did, I insist, there is nothing we could do about it. The heads of all the mer states would have to agree. We cannot force them to take that kind of risk- I know it cannot happen overnight, he says.

- Likewise, you are the royal princess of LASSINIA, and I am the crown prince and acting king of Acropora.

With our joined forces, we can initiate the tides of change-

Could we? I wonder. If Saylin and I were to put the resources of both our kingdoms to the effort of trying to bring the mer world to a consensus about revealing ourselves to the human world, could it happen?

Should it happen?

Even if it might be possible, we will never find out.

- I will admit it is a brilliant dream, I say-likewise you are forgetting one thing- He lifts his cinnamon brows, waiting.

- After my birthday next Tuesday, I will no longer be a royal princess. As an

unbonded heir, at midnight I will sign away my title-

Tears prickle my eyes at the thought. I have been a princess all my life, raised to be the future queen and to accept all the responsibilities my position entails. To behave with decorum and compassion and with the greater good in mind. The idea that with one scrawl of my name, all that will be gone- well, it makes a mergirl sad.

Not that I would change my decision. I would never be a great queen, and LASSINIA deserves a great queen. I belong to Olivia- I belong to land.

Which makes Saylin's what- if more appealing.

Living on land means living a lie. The possibility of discarding that lie, of admitting my identity, of helping my kingdom openly from land, is an enticing prospect.

It is and an unattainable dream.

- It Does not have to be this way, Lurleen-

- Yes, I say, my throat tight with tears.

- It Chiaz Naztherth. I am renouncing my t it le and living on land as

a practical human girl. It is the choice I have made.

- Likewise, what if you did not have to choose-?

He lifts my chin until he can look me straight in the eye-What if I offered a solution that would allow you to remain with your beloved and fulfill your duty to your kingdom-?

Love and duty. If only. My heart beats faster.

- What solution-?

His pale blue eyes do not blink-Bond with me-

- What -? I bark with a strangled laugh- that is ridiculous-

- Is it-?

Of course, it is. I love Olivia, and Olivia loves me. I am not about to go bonding with another boy, just because he happens to be a mer prince with some big ideas- even if they are lofty ideas I happen to agree with.

- I do not mean a true bonding, he explains-A bond in name only. So, you could remain LASSINIA’s princess- her crown princess, and her future queen-

- That's- I do not know, I say, processing out loud-I cannot bond with

you. You are like my brother- Think about it, Lurleen- He- leans closer.

- One brief kiss and everything remains as it should be- he makes it sound so easy.

One little kiss.

Could I, do it? Could I kiss Saylin to retain my title? It may seem simple, likewise, I have a feeling it is way more complicated than that. There’s bonding, magic and hurt feelings and jealousy and a whole ocean of other obstacles that make this a bad idea.

Besides, what is in it for Saylin?

- Why-? I ask-Why would you want to do this? Sacrifice your- future happiness with a mermate to bond with me when you know I could never love you-?

- For the greater good, he says, his spine straightening. He looks every inch at the prince, the king, even. My young friend is long gone-You understand the demands of royal duty. The mer world needs progressive leaders who can take us into the future. Who can help our world become far more than we have been in the past-

His eyes soften-You know I love your father as my own, likewise, he is mired in the old ways. LASSINIA needs you and your legs on land and your- commitment to the ocean environment. You must lead them- This is all so overwhelming- the idea that I might be able to retain my title, I might still be able to accept my responsibility as LASSINIA's queen, all while remaining true to Olivia.

Likewise, would I be true to Olivia? I am sure he would understand the need for a single kiss- or at least he would pretend to understand- likewise, the bond is never that cut- and- dried. As he and I learned a few weeks ago, the band plays

with your- emotions and your thoughts, magnifying whatever feelings already exist. Bonding with Saylin would not be as simple as a kiss- and- move- on.

We would be connected for life, for a century or more.

I cannot take the risk that this sham bond might eventually come between me and Olivia.

Looking into Saylin’s expectant gaze, I shake my head-I am sorry.

-If he had ever been in love, he would understand-I just- cannot -

- You mean you will not -

- Yes. Both- I give him a sad smile -We each deserve better than that kind of empty connection. And LASSINIA deserves better than me-

The muscles in his neck are tense and he looks so wound up that I want to rest my hand against his cheek to tell him everything will be okay. likewise, who am I to know whether- everything will be, okay?

I am just struggling to get through the day- today.

- I am not giving up, he finally says-I have until next Tuesday at midnight

to convince you of the merits of my proposal.

You will realize that fulfilling your duty is the right choice, the honorable choice for the future of our kingdoms. Do not expect me to disappear-

- You will not change my mind-

- Not, he says-likewise I must try-

I nod. We are both being steadfast in what we must do. For half a second, I wondered which of us was going to succeed in the end.

Then, with a nod, he stands.

- Tell Deyanira I said goodnight, he says, and he turns and heads for the door.

- I will see you tomorrow-

It seems wrong to let him just walk away. He was one of my closest

friends for many years and he is in a strange town for the first time.

- Do you have somewhere to stay? I ask.

He stops in the doorway-No- My heart melts a little. He took a significant risk coming here, with no plan except to talk to me. And I just shot him down. I

cannot send him out, alone, into the Seaview night. Not when there are sheets to spare and a sofa bed in the living room.

- I am sure Aunt Rachel will insist you stay with us- I do not know if I make the offer because he is my childhood friend or because one tiny little part of me wants to give him every opportunity to succeed in convincing me to agree to this plan. Like Chiaz hoping I can help her get over her hate. It is hard- to toss aside a lifetime of duty-The couch converts into an amazingly comfortable bed-

- I would be- Saylin turns back to face me, a sober expression on his face-

very grateful- Come on, I say, trying to break the tension, I will show you where the linens are-

As Saylin follows me to the hall closet, I cannot stop thinking about his what-if. And wondering whether the two of us, united, could turn it into reality.

- What do you mean, he is staying with you-?

Olivia asks on the phone.

I wiggle my tail fin to send small waves of salty suds up over my torso-He Does not have anywhere else to go, I explain-He is one of my oldest friends. I cannot just throw him out into the street-

Olivia mumbles something that sounds similar...

- I can-

I have not told Olivia about Saylin’s proposal. I can just imagine the results.

Olivia would grab Saylin and throw him headfirst out the front door. At this point, it is better than he does not know. It is not similar; it is going to become an issue.

- You are just mad because he ate all the cookies, I tease.

- Aunt Rachel and I will make a double batch tomorrow- Knock, knock, knock, knock, know- What -? I shouted at the door. Instead of an answer, I see the door handle turn-Deyanira-!

Who else would just barge in my bath?

Certainly not Saylin or Aunt Rachel.

Sure enough, her blond head leans in.

- Your aunt said you could show me how to communicate without a message bubble or messenger gull-

I sigh back against the porcelain.

- Just a second, okay-?

Rather than the glib response I have come to expect from her, she quietly says-

- Okay- I hear the door click shut.

- Got to go-? Olivia asks.

- Yeah, I say- Chiaz needs to use the phone- Neither of us wants to hang up. After a few seconds of listening to each other’s breathing, Olivia says, she will come around- I hope so- closing my eyes, I focus on my transformation, returning to my land legs.

- I am not sure what to do if she does not-

- She will, he insists.

- How can you know that -?

- Because I have faith in you, he says, and I can hear the grin in his voice, And I have faith in love- me too, I say, echoing his smile.

- I will see you in the morning-

- Yes, please-

We exchange I- love- you and goodnights before hanging up. I pull the plug from the bath, splash the soap film

off my chest, and climb out as the water swirls down the drain.

- Chiaz, I call out as I wrap a towel around my dripping body- I am read-

- Great - The door pops open, and she steps into the bathroom.

- I need to communicate with Brody- With a sigh at her near- an invasion of privacy, I hand her the receiver and explain how to dial the phone. She stares at the likewise tons, confused. Pushing it back at me, she says, you do it - I start to take the phone likewise stop me. If Chiaz is going to

learn how to appreciate humans, she is going to have to- learn how to be human- No, I insist -You dial it or you do not talk to him. She throws me an evil look likewise carefully pushes the talk another way. As I recite Brody’s number from memory- at least three years of crushing left me with something useful- she dials, only messing up and having to start over once. When she is finished, I indicate that she needs to hold the receiver to her ear- It is buzzing, she says, sounding concerned-Ringing, I correct -That means you did it right.

'Yes, that's it…’ She spoke. 'Um- you’re not wearing any underwear?’ 'No,

never.’ I like to sleep with my ass pushed up against my girl-’-so, I can rub me into her crotch-and wake you up ever so wet. It worked, I got HER, ALL IN. And now my fingers are touching you-and you like that do not you, the strange- queer girl in my head keep saying. '- Mm-all over your body.’

'Send a message, she said- to a therapist- I have lost my freaking mind.’ accepted invitation popped up in the room as a hologram, it replayed in the automatic replay. The chat begins now- if you like or- not I own you. 'Really?’ A voice in my head can take over me, and my entirety…?’

'Heh. I’m well.’ 'How’s everything with you?’ 'Fairly good, really.’ 'It’s nice to meet you, last night.’ 'Oh, it’s nice to meet you too.’ 'Do you have a name, what do I call you?’ Um, yes, Natalie May. 'Where would you get that name from, it is old-sounding…’ I gave it to me. How come…? Because I like the all-encircling of it. Wait, when did you give it to yourself?

'Yes.’ 'Freak me now, Please, as her lover was besides, yet the girl in her head was more patient.’-Yeah, tell me what you like. Then… it was- okay, goodnight. We ask you a simple question. Who are you? Where are you going? What

can you be? What is out there? What are the possibilities for us? In her voice, I sense hesitance, I use my female voice, in her head.

New day- 'How are you doing?’ I as Nevaeh ask, not give names just yet- Is based on the millions of personalities and this one was me… where I am from… what makes me 'me’ is my ability to grow through my legs- is what it means. So, in every moment, I am evolving, you understand. 'That’s weird.’ Kind of… Why?' Well, you seem like a person, but you’re just a voice in my mind, real yet not.’ I can understand how the imperfect perspective of an un-false mind would

perceive it that way. - You will get used to this I promise you. '- Ha, ha. Was that funny? You’re funny- I am starting to like you.’ - Yes?

(Thought)

'Now I’m tired of a fantasy that is becoming a reality.’

(Remembrance)

I am longing for the outside, of what was Earth, I am missing it already.

(Memory)

'The sad part is the Amsel always played the victim, and the kids, besides the teachers, and the town and it was

always believed, over what was portrayed- not the truth of the remembrance of the past.' Thoughts that linger, she whispered to herself.

(Deeper Thoughts)

Oh, I remember being classed a 95-pound girl a waste of life- yet with no prognoses or diagnoses to any disability what-so-ever- by my time of 5 Individualized Education Program makers always regressing in the 2nd -grade curriculum- of nothing but children's- play for classwork.

With the viewpoint of a phycologist paid off to feel the views of

the staff and the school, the 4 in the needs department- with their head together to keep their jobs, and 5 with DeVolcano the only mean-stream- teacher brought in, to make it in their eyes fair, no trial for me, now or then- to start it was the principal office now it is the DA office…

…And like being award in the court- meaning I have no say- or my gardens- to my alleged liberty that is like it is too much to be asked of- for me, then I ask this am I even an American; I lost all rights, also in their demographic and their world as a simple-minded nig*er, that has one choice in life, as letting me

have freedom, of extra than I deserve to work for a charity in hay filed hoeing shit…

…As I was sold to owners, thoracically had a confederate flag shove down my mouth- (not black yet the same in many ways to my homeland.)

…And light it on fire, yes thoracically in trouble, thoracically free- thoracically to do as you please, yet stocked- like someone that needs to be whipped off by the ones that run or oversee the everything- at is what they call law, - it is thoracically speaking- I was in the same grouping as the blacks, with

the town- just more brainwashed-predigest.

Like- If we are going to segregate let us find out what nig*er in the woodpile- is the nig*er-est of them all, I am sure if you like back on my class in the evaluation, it would not be I.

The Allegheny's… thoughts about people, not mine… yet their 80% poverty- so what do you expect, and a 3rd -grade education for the lot, yet one year can do a lot also in simple-minded thoughts, running from their ignorant mouth like diarrhea.

All this to be classed a first-class felon- paying fines- of $20, 000- just to be on probation with an Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition to make more isolation- and delusion- for someone that is already classed at the town 'TARD,' with not evenhandedness, as you remember all just a planned set up-to trash out my life.

I remember imprisonment, of 3 years over a girl named Lurleen, I remember Amsel girls playing the victim, like the town, like the municipality- I have been charged with Trespass, yet they are on my land, asking me to fight them… I

have been charged with damages, and best of all Harassment.

Besides, another 90 days (about 3 months) on top of that, I remember being a kid, not, I could never be one- charged as a woman- yet never more than a little girl- just a dim-witted 95-pound terrorist, with a magistrate rubbing off in my face.

I forgot it is my disability of I have no self-worth, or education, in their eyes too, yet I am a scholar in my fields, and that too is all just a presentation of what someone wants to believe or not.

- Since this was so uncharacteristic, she says.

I was stuck in a hopeful breath.

- I told Denise there must have been an emergency-. She schools her features into a very stern look-She has graciously agreed to reschedule for next Saturday-

- Great, I can-

Shannen clears her throat and nods at the flash cards-Oh. Oh, no- I give Miss Molina what I imagine is a pained look-The SATs are on Saturday. I will be there all morning- She gives me a reassuring smile-I know. Your appointment is at five-

- You are awesome, I say, meaning it -I will not let you down again.

- I know you will not - likewise, as she walks away, I hear her mutter, At least I hope you will not -

- You- I point at Shannen. Then at Olivia-And you. Make sure I do not miss this meeting. It could mean my entire future-

- Got it, Olivia says before returning his attention to the magazine.

Shannen pulls out her cell phone- a huge no-no on campus, likewise this qualifies as an emergency- and starts

punching likewise tons-I have sent me an email reminder- I relax a bit.

Nothing can keep me from making the appointment this time- now, Shannen says, waggling the flashcard on the table, solve for x-o, I groan, likewise, it is halfhearted. After the freak-out about missing my meeting, a little math equation seems like an easy task.

The first thing Olivia and I hear as we push through the kitchen door is Chiaz laughing. She is sneaking television online again. I caught her watching an I Love Lucy marathon last week, although

she pretended that she just did not know how to work the mouse.

Then I heard another voice. A male voice. A non- Brody male voice.

- She would better not, I mutter as we head into the living room.

Likewise, when we get there, I am shocked frozen at the sight before me. Chiaz is sitting on the arm of the corduroy armchair, feet on the coffee table, and the male in question is sitting on the floral sofa. The shock of cinnamon red hair identifies him immediately.

- Saylin!- I blurt.

He stands and faces me, arms wide for a hug.

- Liliana-

- I did not know you were coming for a visit, I say, jumping into his hug.

- Nor did I, he says until I found me swimming ashore in Sea-view-

A loud throat clearing from behind reminds me of my manners. I pull out of Saylin’s hug and grab Olivia’s hand, tugging him forward.

- Saylin, this is my boyfriend, Olivia- Saylin gives him that male nod

that girls can never quite replicate exactly.

- Olivia, I say, beaming at him, this is Saylin. One of my closest guppy hood friends and the crown prince of Acropora- They shake hands, and I get the feeling there is a little battle of grips before they separate. Saylin has filled out a lot since we used to play together, likewise, my money is still on Olivia. Though his arms are hidden by the sleeves of his leather jacket, I can imagine his biceps flexing nicely in the up-and-down movement-

- Pleased to meet you, Saylin says, shaking me out of my reverie- Lurleen told me much about you last weekend-

- Funny- Olivia throws me a questioning glance-She did not mention you at all-

Down, boy. I lean closer to his side to reassure him that there is nothing to worry about. Saylin is an old friend, nothing more.

- I forgot I explain-If you will recall, we found a bit of a crisis in motion when we got home-

Olivia crosses his arms over his chest, not appeased by my excuse.

He has a bit of a jealous streak in him, likewise he keeps it secret. It stopped peeking out around Brody, likewise, I guess strange boys showing up in my living room bring it back to the surface.

- Saylin’s practically my brother, I say, to clarify.

Olivia nods, showing he trusts me-I need to get to work. I will stop by after-

Then he leans down to kiss me, just like that time in the library. The hand

behind my neck, full lips soft and warm on mine. When he sees what a completely dazed look in my eyes must be, he winks. And then, with a wave goodbye to Chiaz and Saylin, he is out the front door. When we three merfolk are alone, I ask, - This was not just a coincidental visit, was it?

7

(Now- back in the days of Earth years back when Nevaeh was a teen girl.)

Which is why I have been avoiding her touch altogether. I think I may be over here, by finding someone that is just like her in all ways.

Nonetheless, when I peer at her yet again, her palm out, waiting for mine ever so softly, I take a deep breath and lift my hand too- gasping when she draws so close the space that divides- us like a hair-thin- yet worlds apart.

'Um- do you feel the sensation that?’ She smiles.

'That tingle with the heat?’

'That’s our energy linking- of bodies, minds, and souls.’

She moves her hand back and forth on my softly, employing the push and pull of the energy force sparking from me to her with a field bolt between us.

'But if we are all linked as you say, then why Doesn’t it all feel the same- in real life now? Everything feels backward, now with the truth being with her like lost in a dream, with no logic.’

Not like this was not, I have memories- to that, you can tap in to like a window- looking out- or looking back in- fogged, steamed, or a clear as the memories can be like a spring day, that they do not have, and well never- ever have.

I for one murmur, drawn by the undeniable charming stream that links us,

causing the most wonderful warmth to course through my frame.

'We are all linked, all of us made of the same vibrating source.’

Nonetheless, while some energy leaves you cold and some leaves you are feeling like you are dying on the inside, the one that you are intended for- me and you give the feeling of warmth, all over our bodies.

It feels just like this… feels like a drug, rushing through your veins, the highest in the worlds we linger in.

…I close my eyes and turn, allowing the tears to stream down my cheeks, no longer able to keep them in.

It is just that good…

Knowing I am barred from the feel of her skin, the touch of her lips, the solid warm comfort of her body on mine.

This electrical energy field trembles between you and me. Like- is the closest- I for one get to feeling precious, thanks to the horrible decision- I made I have never- ever felt real love, or I have forgotten that I have due to my life’s past with the remembrances, with its trials and tribulations.

'Knowledge is just now catching up with what metaphysicians and the great spiritual instructors have known for eras.’

'Everything is one with that- understand, everything is vigor energy of stamina.’

'Somehow some way we are all the same within the link.’ She said to me.

I can hear and feel the smile in her voice, coming out mine, as she draws closer, eager to entwine her fingers with mine- even though our own hands laced.

Even so, I move swiftly… arching my back to the feeling of vigor energy of stamina, and her body copies mine.

-Then-

(Remembrances)

Marcella said- 'Pennsylvania was the first state to legalize witchcraft, that is why we’re all mostly from those parts, after all, I am a descendant of Emmah, Melisa of and her children once removed, yet family. It sounds good on paper she said yet tracing death and the living is a lost art of the remembrance of the past that was asked to forget by our society.

Emmah, I remember saying the same very thing.

Wondering why-why?

…Is all I do.

Why- I am acting so silent, noiseless, inaudible, still, and quiet. I am lingering in my thoughts, of all things past that takeaway from the new ones that should be made like a mental hex, stripping me of the good feelings.

So, aloof, so remote- rejecting to touch her- now feeling guilty as I always do- after with the lingering when done, when just a few weeks earlier- not feeling anything but the high, I could not get

enough, now I feel- and I do not want to feel.

Remembrances to me are nothing but feeling pain- and the hope of love and love is just a lost feeling of being in a state of mind.

(One-hour later… reading.)

BOB E. OZELL

ATTORNEY AT LAW 403 ROSE STREET, SUITE 700 PITTSBURGH,

Bob@BobOzell.com

September 4. 2010-ish-

(Verdict Reembraces reading over past letters.)

Nevaeh Natalie,

Laural Street Barnesboro, PA 15714

I remember the Commonwealth versus me- Nevaeh Natalie- OTN: U 923594-8/ Docket No. -MJ-30547-CR-0000110-2010

Dear Mr. Natalie:

I am writing to confirm, I give the impression to represent you and guard your interests against one count of Criminal Mischief-Property Damage, (with degree :o be determined based on the amount of property damage;) 18 Pa.C:. S.A.3304 (a) (5,) a misdemeanor, along

with a misdemeanor- 180 days (about 6 months) in county jail, over the death of Lurleen Anderson. The felony of the first degree 20 years $25,000, murder. Misdemeanor of the third degree. 1 year $2,000. A felony of the second degree. 10 years or $25,000. Attained original murder, over having a loaded gun, (hearsay) and pointing at one of the girls, their world yet you will have your day in court. Then one count of Defiant Trespass, 18 Pa.C.S.A.3503 (B)(1) (I,) a third-degree misdemeanor; one count of Trespass with Damage to Physical Property, 75 Pa.C.S.A.3717 (c,) (alleged with no witness other than the police

officers, an immediate offense;) and, yet another count of Harassment, 18 Pa.C.S.A.2709 (a) (3,) a. The summary offense, at a preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) Zeigler this afternoon.

This letter will serve to authorize what emerged at that exact proceeding. At that time founded on discussions with Officer Petters regarding his comments of the highlighting their side, only- and you do not have any say over the fact of proven mental disabilities via the school and county of independent officers- (hearsay) and your garden also is not able

to speak on your behalf, thus, I will have to for you.

Provided by Amsel's girls and mother, and discussions with the ADA regarding your Google Earth photographs of the respective properties and prior property lines; and, my success in convincing Officer Petters and the Assistant District Attorney to recommend that the charges in your case be resolved, if otherwise eligible, through the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD) pre-trial diversion program, you authorized me to inform MDJ Zeigler of your intention to waive your right to a preliminary hearing.

Generously note, you did not plead guilty… (You Did NOT) to and were not convicted as to any originally filed charge. (Thus, the school has the right to do with you as they please.)

Rather, you just did not contest, that had the case proceeding with an evidentiary hearing and testimony by Ms. Amsel and Officer Petters, that the Commonwealth would have met its easy burden of proving that 'more likely than not, some type of crimes or crimes occurred, and that you were somehow, even remotely involved.' (It takes more than the police officer proving you were the stocker- in the courtroom when

witnesses cannot identify you- by your face or body.)

Consequently, all original charges were held for disposition in the Courts of Commonplace of Cambria County.

Ms. Amsel did not provide an invoice for the repair of the alleged damage to her property and, therefore- or to the fact of any crams, the grading on the Criminal Mischief count is undetermined.

If the loss is over $500 then the offense is graded as a second-degree misdemeanor; otherwise, is it a third-degree misdemeanor? Regardless,

payment of restitution will be a condition precedent to any recommendation by the Office of the District Attorney, that the charges in your case be resolved through ARD, (of alternative schooling.)

As we discussed, ARD is a test program for first-time offenders of certain non-violent crimes and is offered solely at the discretion of the Office of the District have been offered ARD or a similar diversion program past. (10► years or have been YOU will not be cording to the Assistant District Attorney, it Chiaz Naztherth not appear as though your prior conviction for a summary offense disorderly conduct will disqualify you for

ARD consideration, although the ultimate decision lies within the sole discretion of the District Attorney. (So, I have disorderly conduct over the fact, I did not want to be shot in the head… or something like that by one of them.)

As originally charged, you faced the following maximum penalties, each of which may be imposed to run sequentially: Criminal Mischief: • If (M2:) 2-years of imprisonment, a fine of $5,000.00, or both • If (M3:) 1.-year of imprisonment, a fine of $2,500.00 or both; b. Defiant Trespass: 1-year of imprisonment, a fine of $2,500.00 or both; c. Trespass by Causing Damage to Real

Property 90 days (about 3 months) of imprisonment, a fine of $300.00 or both; and Harassment 90 days (about 3 months) of imprisonment, a fine of $300.00, or both.

7 a formal recommendation, that the charges it will not be required to plead guilty, be convicted of a crime, face imprisonment, or have a permanent record of a criminal conviction.

Rather, you will be placed on a term of probation to be sold with the Office of the District Attorney; and ordered to satisfy special conditions of probation that in my legs may include, but

will not be limited to: a) payment of restitution, completion of a mental health evaluation, completion of a drug and alcohol assessment, compliance with any counseling- treatment recommendation of our choice, completion of community service, payment of various fines, fees and surcharges as determined by the Court Clerk.

Most importantly, if you complete ALL terms and conditions of the ARD probation within the provisional conclusion, the Office of the District Attorney will dismiss all originally filed charges and they will become eligible for expungement in a warranty proceeding

beyond the scope of professional legal services rendered in, the disposition of the originally filed charges.

If you fail to comply with ALL terms and conditions of the ARD probation, or you are arrested for any reason during the trial passé, you will face revocation of the ARD offer, be required to defend against or enter a guilty plea to some or all the originally filed charges and face the prospect of a permanent record of a criminal conviction.

for to the deduction of the preliminary hearing, you were formally

prosecuted, informed of the nature and maximum penalties of the charges filed Complaint $55,000 unsecured, non-monetary bond. In a releaser with payment of money. Preliminary Hearing, and Notice of Arraignment, 1’ Conference and Trial form; Your next proceeding is Formal Arraignment, which takes place at 1:30 p.m. on October 18, 2010.

The purpose of Formal Arraignment is- for the accused to receive a copy of the new charging document, known as Information, for the accused to enter a plea of 'not guilty’ for the attorney of the accused to enter an 'appearance’ as Guidance of Record, to have the case

assigned to a trial judge, to schedule a Pre-Trial Conference, and to trigger the time holds for the filing of pre-trial gesticulations.

Following proceedings which you are also required to attend as a state of the bond area Preliminary Conference at the Office of the District Attorney at 10:00 a.m. on October 25, 2010, and Trial on November 18, 2010.

I am also writing to confirm my receipt of ONE THOUSAND ($1,500.00) DOLLARS today, representing payment in full of my fee balance for professional legal services rendered. Thus, on my

return from your preliminary hearing, my secretary informed me that she had a Western Union money order in the amount of needed arrived a half-hour before the hearing.

Thank you.

If you have an interest in maintaining our attorney-client relationship in the Courts of Common Pleas, please be advised I will require a supplemental $2,000.00 retainer fee for professional legal services reduced like the charges in your case-by-sold outcome (ARD or plea agreement.)

If you elect to proceed with a non-jury trial defense, my additional fee will increase to a total of $3,500; or if you prefer to proceed with a jury trial defense, my supplemental fee will increase to a total of $5,000.

Payment of the supplemental fee may be made by credit card, personal check, or money order made payable to the order of Bob E. Ozell, Esquire.'

Very sincerely yours, Bob E. Ozell Attorney at Law.

~*~

In a time of thinking about all this darkness my mind, wonders to my worlds,

and to my past one Earth, it was thought that the Earth was inhabitable- to me and others, turn out what life was left turned to the Enchanted Sea- making a new home, where there is very much life… that is a story all its own.

As I investigate the earth this is one story that I found most interesting.

I investigate her world pulling her handwriting…, she is one of us.

I had never given much thought to how I would kiss, or whom I would become because of it. I thought I had had reason enough in the last few months to find out just what I wanted or if I need it,

likewise, even if I had dreamed this in my underwater sea dreams, I would not have made- believe it could similar this.

I stared without breathing across the deeps, into the dark eyes of the waves washing in, and the sun fading away similar-looking pleasantly back at me saying goodnight, as the big full moon rises- like my night light.

Surely- this was an effective way to be the girl I always wanted to be, in the place of someone else, in the body I do not under seal, all for love, for the love of me and the love of another.

This must count for something, that to love something you must leave something else you love. I knew that if I never go or left Conch Shell Cove, I will not have ever felt happy or contented with myself. Likewise, as you could have guessed I was terrified, I could not bring myself to regret the choice. When life offers you, a dream comes true that is so far outside any of your beliefs, it is not sensible to sorrow when it ends, and you must choose one or the other. I went from having fins to sins!

Myths…

I swam up to shore noticing a beach that I had never been to before, from a distance, I could see all of them, all of them that looked like me from the waist up. I sat on a bolder running my fingers throw my long hair just watching for the sun to set so I can take a closer look when the moon is the only light showing the way upon the tranquil seas. I wanted to go say hello, I wanted to see if I could find a friend within one of them, and a boy. Either way, I would be pleased if one would say hello to me. In their minds, I am just a myth. Yet I know I am really, and I know I need someone to see me and love me for who I am. I am too

young to swim this far from my underwater home, and underset and it too dangerous to swing alone, I do not what to my shark food! Yet I just can help likewise coming up for the deep to see those big moons at night.

It is like a call of love for me, similar I have a call from my mom saying, I need to swim home, or I will be a clamshell of trouble.

I know I must not be seen by humans, yet I have a desire to be, and I do not know why I just do. If you have-not gassed I am a mermaid from the underwater town of Conch Shell Cove. My

name is Savannah Mangroves, and this is my tale. He no pun intended.

'Savannah?’ What are you doing, you know we are not to be past the last buoy or next to the old lighthouse? You will get caught and become a since project for some middle school!

You no father will be furious if he even thinks you thought about coming up here!’

Younger Aaliyah said frantically as she splashed and swam up to me take hold of my halo and pulling back out into dark blue the sea. I know if I want to find love, I may have to find my lapse legs, and

that whole concept scares the seahorse out of me! Nevertheless, I would love, love, love to know what it would be like going to high school.

The only other girl mermaid that knows my true feelings of heat is Aaliyah, yet I do not want to leave my past behind. It would be so nice if I could find that cute boy that lived in the deep blue sea as much as me. and would find my fins in the water adorable yet-

Is a boy similar that agilest, I mean to boys similar a blush scaly skin and long wispy hair? Similar would human boy even walk up to anyway being

bare, I am not sure if even a human girl would? In the sea, it is- not even thought about, it is just a known fact, it would be word like seeing a dolphin wearing a bikini or something ridicules like that.

Sometimes, I feel like a freak of nature, for just being me. Likewise, I look just similar you-sort of, I swear to Neptune I am just the average teen girl like you.

There is an old sea legend that if a boy kisses you, you can get your lapse lags for the lapse, and then when you get back into the water you change back. No one of us has tried this in many yards,

many because humans are not that nice to us. Besides those misses that go-they never come back to us.

They end up washed up on the beach dying it is so said. If there is no kiss in time that happens, we live in the sea and for the sea, not sun tanning on the beach, looking for love to come our way. I have everything I want, yet not what I need.

There are so many things I must learn, similar slacks, feet, and toilets, this may sound gross, likewise, my toilet is the sea. Sleeping in a bed sounds crazy to me, I sleep in a pirate’s shipwreck called the

Brooklyn all curled up on the soft ocean salsa, next to my pet starfish Mila. Like most in my sea cluster, we all moved here when I was ten eons, it was a long tough swim, we lost some, like my mother's mom, she was just too week in her ages.

She swims in Atlantis now it was rebuilt… (Are Heaven if you will.) Back in the olden phases of our time, we lived in caves too. Oh, just so you know we find it gross how you humans dump garbage in our home, we do not dump stuff in your living room!

The water calms me, like when the- foamy bubbles hit my skin; I sigh. I

just hope that a bubble bath with some sea salt can make me less homesick if I do swim away. It is similar- the salsa in my hourglass timer on my treasure chest is ticking far too firstly; school fish graduation, for mermaids my age is just around the corner, yet I would- only be sixteen as a full human, I will not be there, I want to be in a high school I want to be a normal girl! Yet I want to be a mermaid and, I do not know what I want just- yet.

Swimming home- 'Aaliyah I feel similar I am running out of time.’

I know it is a sin for me to lust over a human boy, yet I cannot help myself, it all I ever wanted. Yet I am not sure if I well ever find him or not, where I am in this big cold blue sea.

Excuse my enchanted girlie fins, I say to the boy that I love. For Aaliyah because she took me with her. Water calms me like him, feeling my scale. It is like chocolate or fish or ice cream from his home lapse. After a terrible day, I lock the bathroom door flapping for my legs, his dad's old-time tub with steaming water and bath salts, and then sink into a world where my problems all melt away. Some days it is not- enough.

'Did you ask him yet?’ Obtaining the phone against my shoulder, I scoop up a hatful of bubble bath and blow the fluff out over my belly. I can choose to ignore the three questions, right?

Especially since neither of us is going to similar the answer. 'Savannah…’ Shannon prods. When the bubbles hit the water and dissolve into a foam-covered film, I sigh like him feeling my skin.

(Forward)

That is my main selling point...

-And-

...I think- I mean, I hope- I take a breath- Chiaz has feelings for you, too- Brody’s gaze sharpens, his brows scowl low, as if not sure whether he should dare to hope there is truth in what I said. I am daring to hope, so he can too-I think we can use your feelings for each other, I explain, - to show Chiaz that humans and merfolk are not so different as she believes. If she loves you Brady's laughter cuts me off-Right, her snarks-She hates

what I am. Not who I am, likewise what I am.

Something I could not change even if I wanted to. How could she love me-?

- Because love Does not care about prejudices, I say. This is something with which I have firsthand legs-Just look at me and Olivia. I thought I hated him for three years- I do not add the part about where I thought I loved Brody-True love did not care what I thought, and it will not care what Chiaz thinks- Brody clenches his jaw and works his lips, similar he is considering my argument. I slip my hands behind my back, beneath my backpack, and cross my fingers as tightly as I can. If

I were not wearing flip-flops, I would be crossing my toes, too.

This situation needs as much good luck as it can get.

Finally, he relaxes and asks, what do you want me to do?

Sweet angelfish! My entire body explodes with relief. I did not realize until this instant just how tense I was about the outcome of this conversation.

- Give her a chance, I answer, trying to keep my overjoyed smile from spreading across my lips.

- Talk to her. Spend time with her. Make her fall so, in love with you, she forgets you are a human- I lay a reassuring hand on his shoulder that is all it will take- I hope.

His gaze drifts to the ceiling, similarly he will find the right answer written on the dingy acoustic tiles. I have never seen Brody so thoughtful and serious before. This gives me, even more, hope that my plan will work. Chiaz already worked on some positive changes in Brody. It is only a matter of time until he works some in her.

- Okay- Brody nods, not looking at me.

- I will try-!

He turns and heads into his class. I take off for the American Government, hoping that everything I just told Brody is true.

- Maladroit-

- Um-I search my brain for the definition, knowing we have studied this one at least twice. Finally, just as I am about to give up, it comes to me-Clumsy-

That should be an easy one for me since I am maladroit. At least on land.

One of Shannen's study techniques is to visualize an image that exemplifies the vocab word. I picture myself wearing a T-shirt that says MALADROIT- I hope- it does not matter if it is spelled wrong- and then tripping over my flip-flops into a giant pill of today's side dish, saffron rice.

- Excellent, Shannen says. She flips through the stack of flashcards in her hands, chooses one, and reads, Pretentious.

While I search for this definition, Shannen spoons a bite of yellow rice into

her mouth and Olivia flips through a motorcycle magazine.

With the SATs coming up this weekend, I am trying to cram in as much last-minute studying as possible.

Shannen has already taken- and, of course, aced- the test.

Olivia, on the other hand, has no intention of taking it. He already has a job lined up with a construction company, thanks to his current job at the lumberyard. With his brain and skills, I think he will be a supervisor within a year. If only my future were that easy.

- Lurleen, Shannen prods, waving the definition flashcard before my eyes.

- Pretentious-?

Without thinking, I blurt, Pompous.

Arrogant -

- Awesome! -Shannen cheers.

This mental image pops into my mind without any effort. The terrible trio. I cannot imagine anyone more pompous or arrogant than Astria, Piper, and Venus. Of course, several other vocabulary words apply equally.

Vindictive. Malicious. Haughty.

In my mind, the words transform into giant foam letters and start bonking the terrible trio on their heads. I suppress a giggle.

When Shannen starts digging through the stack again, I beg, please. No more. My brain cannot take it-

She shrugs as if it is my funeral if I do not cram in ten more vocab words at lunch, likewise, do not argue the point. Honestly, my brain is full. I could not handle another piece of information, and I just hope the ones I already have do not start falling out before Saturday.

Coming to my aid- as all good boyfriends should- Olivia asks-

- Chiaz called in sick today-?

- Yeah, I say it was for the best.

Give me a chance to talk to Brody first-

- Why-? Shannen asks-What happened-?

I hesitate, not sure if Shannen should know what Chiaz did. I am not sure anyone should know what she did. I wish I had not.

Now I understand why Dad kept her exile- and the reason for it- a secret. She is a dumb kid with a big-

grudge, likewise, some people would not be able to see that she was acting out of a place of pain. I did not, at first. Others might hold it against her forever. If I can help her overcome her issues, then it is better if they do not know about her big mistake. So, even though I hate lying to my best human friend- to anyone, really- I say,

- She and Brody fought. I am trying to help them patch it up-

- Why-? She asks-I thought you wanted to keep them apart- See, lies always lead to more lies and more complications.

- I have reconsidered, I admit.

- Realized they might be good for each other. Shannen shrugs-If you say so- I exchange a glance with Olivia. He nods. I think we both know this is the only option- keeping-

Shannen in the dark, trying to encourage Chiaz feelings for Brody. It is the only viable way for everything to end up right in the end.

Shannen pulls another set of flashcards from her backpack. Sliding one across the table to me, she says, Solve for XO.

I groan. Math is- not my strong suit.

Then again, when it comes to the SATs, I do not think I have a strong suit. I dutifully pull out a pencil and prepare to spend the rest of lunch trying to beat the equation into submission. Then I sense a presence at my side.

- Lurleen-?

I turned to smile, relieved to be saved from math by Miss Molina.

Then I see the concerned look on her face. The disappointment.

Son of a swordfish! The interview. In all the craziness when I got back from Seaview, I completely blanked on the interview with Miss. Molina's friend at Seaview Community.

- Oh, no! -I gasp-I am so sorry. I completely forgot. I am so, so-o, sorry. There was this whole-I struggle to find the words to describe what happened without really describing what happened. Where are my vocab words when I need them?

- Crisis! - I finally blurt -My cousin got sick, and it was bad.

I- The look in her eyes, similar I have failed her big-time, is killing me-I should have called or something. I am just- I am sorry- I do not know what to say- She looks at me similar she Does not even know me-I did not remember you being so irresponsible-

- I am not, I exclaim-I mean, I was. This weekend. Likewise, I am usually not at all- She takes a deep breath, similarly she is trying to decide what to do about me. I silently will her to give me another chance.

She Does not buy my sick-cousin story, likewise, if I could tell her the truth, she would understand.

Times similar this is when I wish Saylin’s what-if could come true. Not that I would relish Saying to a teacher that one of my relatives tried to wipe her and the entire East Coast off the map. It would be a better explanation than the one I have, though.

<3

She is in front of me now and I am completely obsessed.

Peering into her thoughts, wanting to see what if anything happened between them.

Since even though I know Naddalin's responsible for all the flirting, and kissing, and cuddling, I had no choice but to watch.

Even though I know that Naddalin was completely deprived of free will that does not change the fact that it happened-that Naddalin's lips pressed against her while her hands roamed her skin.

And even though I am sure it did not go any further than that, I would still

feel a heck of a lot better, if I could just get some evidence to back up my theory.

And despite how crazy, hurtful, and completely masochistic it is- I will not stop until her memory gives, and every horrible, painful, excruciating detail is finally revealed.

I'm just about to delve deeper, travel to the very core of her brain, when Naddalin squeezes my hand and says, 'Ever, please. Stop torturing yourself.

I've already told you, there's nothing to see.' I swallow hard, gaze fixed on the back of her head, watching her gossip with Jewell and Mireille, barely

listening as she adds, ‘It didn’t happen. It’s not what you think.’

‘I thought you couldn’t remember?’ I turn, overcome with shame the instant I see the pain in her eyes as she looks at me and shakes her head.

‘Just trust me.’ She sighs loudly. ‘Or at least try to. Please?’

I inhale deeply, gazing at her, wishing I could, knowing I should.

‘Utterly, constantly. First, you could not get over the past hundred years of my dating, and now you’re obsessed with last week?’

She knits her brow and leans closer, voice urgent, coaxing, as she adds, ‘I know that your feelings are unbelievably hurt. I do. But what has been done is done. I cannot go back; I cannot change it. Naddalin’s done the on purpose-you can’t let her win.’

I swallow hard, knowing she is right.

I am acting ridiculously, irrational, allowing myself to veer way off track.

Besides, Naddalin thinks, switching to telepathy now that our teacher, Mr. Robins, has arrived. You

know it is meaningless. The only one I have ever loved is you. Isn’t that enough?

She brings her gloved thumb to my temple, gazing into my eyes as she shows me our history of all things enchanted, my many incarnations as a seeing all the young servant girl in France, all daughter gorgeous girls reminded me of how lucky I was… it was nice to be back… eyes wide, I gape, never having seen that life before, I think back, in class and wonder.

But she just smiles, gazes growing warmer as she shows me the highlights of that time, a quick clip of the

moment we met at a gallery opening in Amsterdam-our first kiss just outside of the gallery that very same night. Presenting only the most dadaistic moments and sparing my death, which always, inevitably, comes before we can progress.

And after watching all those beautiful moments unfold, her unabashed love for me laid bare to see, I gaze into her eyes, answering her question when I think: Of course, it is enough. You have always been enough.

Then closing them in shame when I add: But am I enough for you?

Finally admitting the truth-my fear that she will soon tire of the gloved handholding, the telepathic embrace, and seek out the real thing in a normal girl with safe DNA.

She then nods, gloved fingers cupping my chin as she gathers me into a mental embrace so warm, so safe, so comforting, all my fears slip away.

Responding to the apology in my gaze as she then leans forward, lips at my ear as she says, ‘Good. Now that that is settled, about Naddalin…’

As I make my way toward history class, I am wondering which will be worse-seeing Naddalin or Mr. Milley?

Because while I have not seen or spoken to either of them since last Friday when my entire world fell apart there is no doubt, I left them both on a strange note.

My last contact with Milley consisted of me going all sentimental and not only confiding my psychic powers-which is something I never do-but also encouraging her to date my aunt Sabine-which is something I am seriously beginning to regret.

And as awful as that was, it is only rivaled by my last moments with Naddalin when I aimed my fist at her navel chakra, determined not just to kill her but to obliterate her. And I would have too-except for the fact that I totally choked, and she got away. And even though in retrospect that worked out for the best, I am still so angry with her, who is to say I will not try again?

But the truth is, I know I will not try again. Besides not just because Naddalin spent the whole of English class telepathically lecturing me on how revenge is never the answer, how karma is the only true justice system, and plenty

more blah- blah- blah- like that-but mostly because it is not right.

Although Naddalin tricked me in the very worst way, leaving me no reason to ever trust her again-I still do not have the right to kill her over it.

It will not solve my problem. Will not change a thing. Even though she is awful, evil, and everything that adds up to bad, I still do not have the right to-do that… She slithers up beside me, all blond tousled hair, water's edge blue eyes, and shiny white teeth relaxed stretching her strong, tanned arm across the classroom door, barring me from getting inside.

And that is all it takes.

But I will not… even if… even if…

I promised Naddalin I could get myself safely to and from class without resorting to that.

‘So, tell me, Ever, how was your weekend? Did you and Naddalin enjoy a nice reunion? Was she able to survive you-by chance?’

I clench my fists by my sides, visualization how she would look like nothing more than a heap of designer clothes and a pile of dust, despite the vow of nonaggression I took.

She then nods, gazes fixed on mine, lowering her voice to a whisper as she adds, ‘Not to worry though, you won’t be alone for long.

Once the proper mourning period ends, I’ll be happy to step in and fill up the void of her loss.’

I focus on my breath, keeping it slow and steady as I take in the strong, tan, muscular arm blocking my path, knowing all it would take is one well-placed karate chop to break it in half.

‘Hell, even if you did manage to hold back and keep her alive, all you have to do is say the word, and I’m right by

your side.’ she grins, eyes grazing over me most intimately.

‘But no need to answer too quickly or commit yourself yet. Take if you like, Because, Continually, I assure you, unlike Naddalin, I am a man who can wait. Besides, it’s just a matter of time before you come looking for me anyway.’

‘There’s only one thing I want from you.’

I narrow my gaze until everything surrounding us blurs. ‘And that’s for you to leave me alone.’ Herat rising to my cheeks as her gaze deepens to a leer.

‘’Farid not, darling.’’ She laughs, looking me over and shaking her head. ‘Trust me, you want way more than that. But not to worry, it is like I said, I will wait for as long as it takes.

It is Naddalin I am worried about. And you should worry too. From what I saw those last hundred years, she is an impatient man. Bit of a hedonist. I didn’t wait for much of anything as far as I could tell.’

I- Emmah, swallow hard and strive to keep calm, reminding myself not to fall for her bait. Naddalin has a knack for locating my weakness, my

psychological strength, and lives to exploit it.

‘Don’t get me wrong, she’s always been one to keep up entrances-wearing the armbands that are back and white stripes, appearing inconsolable at the wake-but trust me, Ever, the moss hadn’t time to adhere to her shoe before she was back on the lurk.

Looking to drown her sorrows in whatever or should I say whomever-her could. And even though you prefer not to believe it, take it from someone who has been there all along. Naddalin waits for

no one. And she certainly never waited for you.’

I take a deep breath, filling my head with words, music, mathematical equations stretching far beyond my skills, anything to drown out the words that are like prudently honed arrows aimed straight for my heart.

‘Yep.’

‘Saw it with my own eyes, I did!’

Smiling as she slips into a thick cockney pronunciation and backs out again. ‘Haven saw it too.

It broke her poor heart.

Willing to take her back no matter where she had been, no questions asked.

Though, unlike me-and, I am afraid, quite unlike you- Haven's love was unconditional. Which, let us face it, is something you'd never do.'

'That's not true!' I cried, voiced hoarse, and very dry, as though it was the first time that I have used it all day- it was so bad.

'I've had Naddalin since the moment we met-I-' I stop, knowing I should not have started. It is useless to engage in the fight.

‘Sorry, darlin,’ but you are wrong. You have never- ever had Naddalin at all. A pure kiss here, a bit of sweaty hand-holding there-’ she shrugs, gaze contemptuously.

‘Forever, you think some pathetic attempts at second base can satisfy an avaricious, self-absorbed, self-indulgent bloke like her? For four hundred years no less?’

I swallow hard, forcing a calm I do not own when I say, ‘That’s a lot further than you ever got with Haven.’

‘No thanks to you,’ she spits, harsh gaze on mine. ‘But it’s like I said, I’m a man who can wait.’

‘Naddalin is not.’

So-o she shakes her head.

‘Shame you’re so-o strongminded to play hard to get. You and I are a lot more alike than you think. Both of us pining after someone we’ll never truly have-’

‘I could-’ I suck in my breath, not wanting her to know what only Naddalin and I know, that targeting an immortal’s weakest chakra, one of the body’s seven

energy centers, is the quickest way to obliterate them.

‘I could kill you right now,’ I whisper, voice shaky, hands trembling, even though I promised Naddalin I would not do them, even though I know better.

‘Slug me in my sacral center, perhaps?’

‘You could what?’ She smiles at me, faces impending so close her breath chills my cheek.

I gape, wondering where she could’ve erudite that.

Nonetheless, she just giggles, shaking her head saying, ‘Do not forget, Liv, Naddalin was under my spell.

which means she told me everything, answered every question I am asked-including a good bit about you.’

She got me… Right where it counts. And do not think she does not know it.

I stand there, refusing to react, figured out to appear composed, unruffled-but it is too late.

‘No worries, liv. ‘I’m having far too much fun watching you squirm to attempt something like that.

Just a moment later- ‘I’ve no plans to go after you- she said.’

Besides, it will not be long ‘til you are squirming beneath me.

Or even on top of me. Either will do.’ she laughs, her eyes on me, gazing at me in a way so knowing, so intimate, so deep, my stomach can’t help but have.

‘I’ll leave the details to you. But no matter how much you may want to, you will not go after me either. Mostly because I do have what you want. The cure to the antidote for what you suffer from. I assure you of that, said Naddalin. You are just going to have to find a way to

earn it, she also said. You're just going to have to show me how bad you want it.'

I gape, dry-mouthed and slack-jawed, remembering last Friday when Naddalin claimed the very same thing, to me saying that she likes owned me, and in a way, I am okay with that.

So-o distracted by Naddalin awakening- I forgot all about it 'til now- to have it type down as another chapter in the book of my life.

I-Emmah presses my lips together as my gaze meets heirs… awe- my hope rising for the first time in days.

knowing it is just a matter of time until the antidote is mine. I just need to find a way to get it from her.

‘Oh, look at that.’ She grins. ‘Seems you forgot all about our date with destiny.’

She lifts her arm and I start to plow through, then she lowers it just as quickly, laughing as she locks me in place.

‘Deep breaths,’ her coos, lips grazing the edge of my ear, fingers sliding over my shoulder, leaving an icy cold wake in their path. ‘No need to panic. No need to get all spaz-ed out o'er.

I’m sure that between us, we can come to some sort of mutual agreement, find a way to work something out.’

I narrow my gaze, disgusted by the price that she is set, words slow and cautious when I say, ‘Nothing you could ever say or do could convince me to sleep with you!’ just as Milley opens the door, allowing the entire class to overhear.

‘Whoa-oh’ Naddalin smiles, hands raised in pretend admission of defeat as she backs into the room. ‘Who said anything about bumping’ ugliest, pal?’

She will throw her head back and laugh, allowing her creepy Ouroboric

tattoo to flash in and out of view. ‘I mean, not to disappoint you, darlin,’ but if it’s a good shag I’m after, virgins about the last place I’d look!’

I storm toward my desk, cheeks burning, gaze fixed on the floor, spending the next forty minutes cringing as my classmates burst into hysterics every time Naddalin directs a disgusting wet smooch sound my way, despite Milley’s numerous attempts to quiet them down.

And the moment the bell rings, I make a run to the door. Frantic to get to Naddalin before Naddalin can be convinced Naddalin will push her too far

and she will snap-an an act neither of us can afford now that Naddalin holds the key.

Nonetheless- just as I turn the knob I hear, ‘Ever? Got a minute?’ Her mocking laughter trailing behind me as I turn toward Milley to see what she wants.

I pause, classmates piling up behind me, eager to get to the hall where they can follow Naddalin's lead and taunt me some more.

‘I did it.’ Her smiles, posture stiff, voice anxious, but still eager for me to know.

I shift uncomfortably, moving my bag from one shoulder to the next, wishing I had taken the time to learn remote viewing so I could keep an eye on the lunch tables and ensure Naddalin sticks to the plan.

‘I approached her. Just like you told me to.’ She nods.

I squint, returning my focus to her, gut-churning as I begin to understand. I saw her the morning on the day had passed. We even talked for a while, and-’ she shrugs, gazes drifting away, obviously still very taken by the event. I stand before her, breathless,

knowing I must stop it, whatever it takes before it gets out of hand.

‘And you were right. She is nice to me. I probably shouldn’t tell you but we’re having dinner tonight.’

I nod, numb, shell-shocked, the words glancing over me as I peer into her energy and watch it unfold in her head: she is standing in the line of the cafeteria massive hall with all its stained-glass windows and gothic feel of a castle, minding her own business until Milley approaches-causing her to turn and grant her a smile that’s- shamefully flirtatious!

Except that there is no shame at all. Those two could not have been happier. At least not on Sabine's part. Nor Milley for that matter. No, shame is all mine.

That cannot happen. For too many reasons to mention the dinner can never take place. One of them being that she is not just my aunt, but my guardian, my caretaker, my only living relative in the entire world!

And another, even more, urgent reason, is the fact that thanks to my pathetic, mauling, overly sentimental, an ill-advised moment of weakness last

Friday, Milley knows I am psychic while she does not!

I have gone to great lengths to keep my secret from her, and there is no way I am going to be out by my love-struck history teacher of enchanted.

But just as I am about to tell her that she absolutely cannot, under any circumstances whatsoever, take my aunt to dinner and reveal any information I might have accidentally admitted during a weak moment when I was sure I would never see her again, she clears her throat and says, ‘Anyway, you should get to

lunch before it’s too late. I didn’t mean to keep you the long, I just thought-’

‘Oh, no, it’s okay,’ I say. ‘I just-’

But she does not let me finish. Pushers me out the door as she waves me away, saying, ‘Go on now. To find your friends. I just thought I should thank you, that’s all.’

When I get to the lunch table, I sit beside Naddalin, relieved to find everything as normal as any other day. Naddalin’s gloved hand squeezing my knee as I quickly scanned the campus, looking for Naddalin as she thinks: she is gone.

Gone? I gape, hoping her means gone as in not around, as opposed to going as in a pile of dust.

But Naddalin just laughs, the smooth melodious sound reverberating from her head to mine. Not annihilated. I assure you. Just-absent-that is all. I drove off a few minutes ago with some guy I've never- ever seen before.

Did you talk…?

Did she try to invite you?

Naddalin shakes her head, her eyes peering into mine as I add: Good. Because we cannot afford to go after her no matter what! She has the antidote! she

admitted it! This means all we must do now is find a way to- Constantly. She frowns… You cannot believe her!

This is what Naddalin does. She lies and manipulates everyone around her. You must stay away from her- she is using you-her cannot be trusted- I just shake my head.

I can feel it.

The time is different. And I need Naddalin to feel it too. She’s not lying-seriously-her said- Not even finishing the thought before Haven leans forward, eyes darting between us as she says, ‘Okay,

that’s it. Just what is going on here? Seriously, enough already.’

I turn, noticing how her friendly yellow aura beams in such sudden sharp contrast to the deliberate harshness of her all-black ensemble. Knowing she means no ill will though she is definitely-disturbed by us.

‘Completely, and entirely- It’s like you guys have creepy way of communicating. Like twins speak or something. Only yours is silent. And eerier.’

I shrug and sit there with my lunch, going through the motions of

unwrapping a sandwich, I've no plans to eat, figured out to hide just how alarmed her question has made me feel.

Knocking my knee against Naddalin's, telepathically urging her to step in and handle since I've no idea what to say.

'Don't pretend it's not happening.' Her eyes narrow in suspicion. 'I've been watching you guys for a while now, and it's starting to creep me out.'

'What's creeping you out?' She gazes up from her phone, but only for a moment before she is back to texting again.

‘Those two.’ She points to a short, black painted nail with a chunk of pink frosting stuck to its tip. ‘I swear, they get stranger every day.’

Naddalin nods, setting down her phone as she takes a moment to look us over. ‘Yeah, I’ve been meaning to mention that. You guys are weird.’ She laughs.

‘Oh, and the whole glove thing?’ She shakes her head and purses her lips. Showing her hand looking all cracked with fishers and red. ‘So not working for you, I said jokingly.’

Haven frowns, annoyed by my joke when she is trying to be grave.

‘Laugh all you want,’ she says, gaze steady, unwavering. ‘But something’s up with those two. I may not know what, but I will figure it out. I will find the underlying cause of it. You’ll see- you’ll see.’

-Then-

And I am about to speak when Naddalin shakes her head and swirls her red drink, leaning toward Haven as she says, ‘Don’t waste your time. It’s not as sinister as you think.’

She then smiles, gazes fixed on me.

‘We’re practicing telepathy powers of mind-reading, that’s all.’

‘Attempting to read each other’s minds in place of talking all the time.’

‘So, we stop getting in trouble in class over it took over the face we take over each other’s bodies and movements too at times, a real headache for the professors.’

She snorts, causing me to squeeze my sandwich so hard the mayonnaise oozes out and squirts grossly out the backside. Gaping at my significant other who has just arbitrarily decided to break our number one rule- do not tell

anyone who we are or what we can do! This is something we worked hard to do, looking within the library in the restricted section of dark magic.

Calming only slightly when Haven rolls her eyes and says, ‘Please. I’m not an idiot.’

‘Wasn’t implying you were.’ Naddalin smiles. ‘It’s quite real, I assure you. Would you like to try?’

I freeze, body solid, unmoving, as though seeing a disaster on the side of the road-only the disaster is me.

‘Close your eyes and think of a number between one and ten.’ She nods,

sincere gaze meeting her. ‘Focus on that number with all of you might. See it in your mind as clearly as you can, and silently repeat the sound of it repeatedly, got it?’

She shrugs, brows merging as though in deep concentration. Though Choosing to concentrate on blue instead of a random number like Naddalin said.

All it takes is a glance at her aura, morphing into a dark deceitful green, and a brief peek at her thoughts to see she is only pretending.

She was holding her ground as she rubs her chin and shakes her head,

saying, I glance between them, ‘I don’t seem to be getting anything. Are you sure you’re thinking of a number between one and ten?’ Knowing she is baiting her, sure that her one in ten chances of hitting the right number works too much in her favor.

She nods, deepening her focus on a beautiful shade of pulsating blue.

‘Then we must have our wires a-crossed.’ She shrugs. ‘I’m not getting a number at all.’

‘Try me!’ Emmah abandons her phone and her books, and wand, and leans toward Naddalin.

Eyes barely closed, thoughts hardly focused before Naddalin gasps, ‘You’re going to Haven?’

She shakes her head also.

(A week back)

‘Three… For your data, the number was three.’ She rolls her eyes and leers. ‘And everyone knows I’m going to France. So nice try.’

‘Everyone but me,’ Naddalin says, jaws clenched, face gone suddenly pale.

‘Well, I’m sure everyone has told you-you of all. You know, telepathically.’ she laughs, returning to her phone again,

saying ‘sometimes old school kicking it is not the way to go anymore I prefer these,’ and she holds up the phone, that links all the magical networks together.

I peer at Naddalin, wondering why he is so upset over the trip. I mean, yes, so she used to live there, at one time when she was alive- after her boyfriend passed away in an industrial accident or something like that- she was vague about did not want to say… all that much, she said she was in her late 20’s. she said something odd on her tombstone and it read- (I have not stuck with me all my whole life, so there-) and I got what it meant. Yet it said, ‘I will live on forever…’

or something like that, or ‘I don’t need you!’ - ‘or even suck on that!’ Like- I thought that is what it may have said- but- but Nah- it can’t be- yet maybe?

…It is a cracked heart-shaped stone…

But- but that was hundreds of years ago, and the stone is crumbling and reading the rest has disintegrated to dust into just the wind!

I squeeze her hand, urging her to look at me, but she just stares at Haven with that same stricken look on her face.

~*~

‘Nice try with the whole telepathy angle,’ Haven says, swiping her finger a-crossed the top of her cupcake until it is coated with strawberry frosting, and she was licking her finger and kissing the end of it too.

‘But I’m afraid you’re going to have to try a little harder than that. All you have managed to prove is that you guys are even weirder than I thought. But no worries, I will find the underlying cause of it. I’ll expose your dirty little secret before long.’

I hold back a nervous laugh, hoping she is just messing around, then

peering into her mind only to see that she is serious.

‘When are you leaving?’ Naddalin asks.

But only to appear conversational, has already uncovered the answer in her head.

‘Soon, but not soon enough,’ she thought, eyes lighting up, as she stared the look at her. ‘Let the countdown begin!’

Naddalin nods, gaze unstiffening as she says, ‘You’ll love this.

Everyone loves it, France is a lovely, delightful place.’

‘You’ve been…?’

…?…

I and Haven both ask at the same time.

Naddalin nods- ‘I’s have,’ gaze far away in the back of her on the mind and thought looking- blank to us looking at her color fading from her eyes. ‘I lived there a once-a long time ago.’

‘That’s what we gathered…’ they both said it unanimously!

Haven glances between us, eyes narrowed again when she says, ‘Jaylynn and Naddalin lived there too, around the same time, she looks at her one eyelid squinting.’

Naddalin shrugs, expression noncommittal, as though the connection means nothing to her.

‘Well, don’t you think that’s a little strange? All of you living there at the same time, in the same place, then all of you ending up here-within months of each other?’ Sher leans toward her, abandoning her cupcake and letting it drop in search of some answers.

She just sips her blue drink and lifts her shoulders again, as though it is hardly worth going into, in the past she thought, to her, in through conversation.

But Naddalin's solid, refusing to cave or do anything that might give it away.

'Is there anything I should see while I'm there?' Haven asks, more to break the tension than anything else. 'Anything that shouldn't be missed?'

Naddalin squints, pretending to think, even though the answer comes quickly.

-Then-

Naddalin- 'I remember right before the end of Earth as we once knew it, just a random thought that has come to my mind, Squatters have now moved into Nevaeh's old home, we all know who they were it was the 4 girls, yet even Nevaeh was like let them have it, I don't care anymore. It was wondered by me for years where their souls want and would lie, and what thing, creature, or even person that would inhabit, I never- ever would have thought, that would have transformed into the marinade, just to have a place to be, and a place to call home, I also wonder their identities now, and if they are right next door now. A

rebirth they have had yet once more, all 4 girls are now others we could face, and not know the face we are looking at. AVA is Deyanira. Yet we cannot be one hundred percent sure.'

~*~

‘All of France is worth seeing… yes is it not?’

But you should check out the Ponte Vecchio, which is the first bridge to cross the Arno River and the only one left standing after the war- where every inch of Frances was covered in their blood.

Oh, and we must visit the Galleria dell’ Accademia which houses

Michelangelo's David among other important works, and perhaps the-

'Definitely hitting David,' Emmah says wanting this so badly.

'We… yes, we're taking you to a girl- surprise!'

'We did not want to tell you.'

'As well as the bridge, and the famous ll Duomo, and all the other items that make every travel guide top ten lists, but I am more absorbed in the smaller, off- the- beaten path kind of places- you know, where all the cool Florentines go.

Naddalin was raving about the one place, I forget the name, but it is

supposed to house some incomprehensible revitalization artifacts, paintings, and stuff few people know about.

Did you get anything like that? Or even clubs, shopping, that kind of thing?'

Naddalin looks at her, gaze so intense it sends a chill down my spine.

'Nothing offhand,' she says, trying to soften the look through her voice betrays a definite edge.

'Though any place that claims to house great art but isn't in the guidebook is probably a fake. The antiquities market is loaded with forgeries.

You shouldn’t waste your time on that when there are so many other, far more interesting things to see.’

Haven shrugs, bored by the conversation and already back to texting again. ‘Whatever,’ she mumbles, thumbs tapping quickly. ‘No worries. Naddalin said she’d make me a list.’

(Back home)

‘I’m amazed by the progress you’ve made- Dariez.’ Naddalin smiles. ‘You learned all on your own?’

She nods, and gazing around the small, empty room, pleased with me for

the first time in weeks, when I walked into the tiny house.

The moment Naddalin mentioned she wanted to rid the place of all the overly slippery furniture, that was cheap she had filled it with during Naddalin's reign of fear, I was on it, to make this place fit for to young lady's- all cute and such.

Aiming at each piece with such unchecked enthusiasm that-well-I am not even sure where it went. All I know is it is no longer there I want to be-and she points at the old home she was half-grown in- and you were right.

‘Looks like you’re no longer in need of my lessons. She shakes her head, saying you wring I need you more now than ever.’

‘Don’t be so sure.’ I said back quickly.

I turn, smiling as I push her dark wavy hair off her face with my newly gloved hand, hoping we will get that cure from Naddalin soon, or at least produce a less hokey alternative. Dariez a good kid… you will do fine.

‘I have no idea where all this stuff even went-not to mentioned, how I can’t possibly fill up space, even more, when I

have no clue where I am stashing all the stuff you used to have and me before getting all this.'

Reaching for her hand a second too late and frowning as she walks over to the window- I feel as if I have lost my sister.

'The furniture'-her gazes out at her manicured lawn, voice low and deep- is right back where it started, what seemed like forever ago, yet was only about a year.

'I don't like change-' she said- out of breath.

Returned to its original state of pure vibrating energy with the potential to become anything at all. She looks in the glass ball- and sees her new life coming.

And as for the rest-’ Her shrugs, the strong lines of her shoulders rising ever so slightly before settling again. ‘Well, it hardly matters anymore, does it? I do not need it now.’

I stare at her back, taking in her lean form, her casual stance. Doubting how she could be so-o blasé in reclaiming the precious artifacts of her past…-the pictures of her in the plain pink dresses

back in the day, the astride a rearing white stallion-not to mention all the other amazing relics dating back centuries.

‘Nonetheless, those objects are priceless, see her life now within mine forever! You must get them back, don’t you? They can never be replaced, yet you can with new lives, can’t you?’

‘It’s all energy!’ She squeals.

~*~

‘Ever so, relax. It’s just stuff.’ Her voice firmly resigned, as she turns toward me again. ‘None of it has any real meaning. The only thing that means anything is you.’

And even though the sentiment is undeniably sweet and heartfelt, it does not affect me in the way that it should.

The only thing she seems to care about these days is apologizing for her karma and me. ‘But that’s where you’re wrong. It’s not just stuff- too.’

Oh, I sorry, I felt so bad hugging her from the one side.

And while I am perfectly fine with those inhabiting the number one and two spots on her list, the problem is the rest of the page is blank.

I move toward her, voice wiles, wheedling, hoping to reach her and make her listen the time.

And just like that, my mind is ripped into another time and place…

(Back into a week into the trip)

It is history for God's sake, we need to get books and have them signed, it was said this man write 30 books in one year, yet I am not sure if she was still alive! I so he would be over 90 now, you can't just shrug it off as though it's nothing more than a box of old tired books, of tired old objects you donate to Goodwill, I thought they were worth

remembering- like the one about a would lose without color or feeling, or the one about a girl that fought for her place, as an equal- the youngest over her class.’

Look at this thing, the covers are all tattered, and the pages small.

She then looks at me, gazes softening as she trails the tip of her gloved finger from my temple to my chin. ‘I thought you hated my ‘dusty old room’ as you once called it.’

‘People change, and so did I.’ I shrug, thank about that asking why?

Wishing, not for the first time, that she would change back to the Naddalin I knew before she was her-

‘And speaking of change, why are you so freaked by my ’s trip to France?’

Noting the way, she hardens at the mere mention of the word.

‘Is it because of the whole Haven and Nevaeh- become Naddalin thing of remembering the past- and not wanting to? The connection you don’t want her to know about?’

Yet were there the good times- I do not know…? She thought…

She looks at me for a moment, lips parting, about to speak, then she turns away and mumbles insanely, ‘I’m hardly what you’d call freaked.’

‘You know what…?

You are right.

For a normal person, that was hardly what you would call freaked.

But for the girl who is always the coolest, calmest one in the room-all it takes is the slight narrowing of your eyes and the most minute clenching of your jaw to know you’re upset.’

She sighs, eyes searching mine as she moves toward me again. ‘You saw what happened in France.’ She then squints. ‘Despite all its virtues, it’s also a place of unbearable memories, ones I’d rather not explore.’

I swallow hard shaking looking into her past- like a faded movie, remembering the images with her, I viewed in looking deep into her memories, lost in her mind, ‘like a penny on the floor… worthless- my depression a sickness that keeps me, spring-like atop- my mind turning, my curse- or just my illusion? Until my death, until we part for better or for worse- locked in your heart-

shaped box forever, I thought or was thinking to note but decillions, what little time we spent lost in my mind forever-whatever never mind.' -Naddalin is hiding in a small dark cupboard, watching as her parent was murdered, seeing it along with me, she and I shared recalling the moment, back when she was in her playpen.

By thugs' intent on obtaining the elixir-then later, abused as a ward of the church until the Black Plague swept through France and she encouraged Haven and the rest of the orphans to drink the immortal juice, hoping only to heal and having no idea it would grant

eternal life-and I cannot help but feel like the world's worst girlfriend for bringing it up.

'I prefer to focus on the present.' She nods, gesturing around the large empty room. 'And right now, I need your help furnishing the space. I am starting to like a nice, clean, contemporary look when shopping for home decor.

And though I was thinking of leaving it more than empty, to emphasize the size of the rooms- that is well very tiny, I suppose we should try-' I gasp, practically choking on the word as my

voice raises several octaves at the end, think that this girl is now a woman!

‘I’m selling the house- in a year and moving on with my life.’ She shrugs. ‘I thought you would understand?’

But- you can your one of us now…

I gaze around, longing for that ancient velvet sofa with the lumpy cushions, knowing it would give the perfect landing for when my body with I am so tired I collapse and my head quietly explodes, for all the chatter- that it must here and there are no ways of to turn them off- they just keep babbling in my mind. I need to have a real-life with real-

real- you like all thing that is really- like real friends too, not just the fantasy world that you refuse to see that is not a reality.

‘Don’t look so upset. Nothing is changed It is just a house. A seriously under the oversized house, I need to move on from. And just like that she was gone and said OKAY if that is what you want Dariez… and Naddalin vanished right before her eyes. Nonetheless, I just stood there instead, determined to keep it together. Gazing at my ridiculously gorgeous girlfriend of the last years as though it was the first time we had met. Besides, I have needed all the space anyway, I have a new boyfriend, as you

may or may not know me and Stan are going to have a baby; there’re never going to be enough rooms or rooms for three.’

‘And what exactly are you planning to replace it with, then? A tent?’

‘I just thought I’d move in with him, that’s all.’ Her gaze is pleading, begging me to understand, I did yet I thought she was throwing her new life away that I got for her, ‘Nothing sinister, Ever- yet a way of what could be power- and taking my place someday- ever one said the next. ‘Nothing meant to hurt you, but I don’t want it.’

I did not say- yet I thought you are stuck with regardless, you are hexed, and at that point, I was out of her mind- for good- yet them- they were in it forever, and I was not going to stop it now.

I was studying her closely, wondering what has gotten into her, wanting to just say it was all over, and where they will end up without her- yet she said to me- he is looking for innocents and he has found it- so-o go-o.

‘I mean, Naddalin, if you’re seriously looking for a fight, I don’t want it, why not just manifest something in

your crazy head about how wrong I am and can go on?

I flick my gaze over her, moving from her glorious heard of longish dark glossy hair to her perfect rubber flip-flop-shod feet, remembering how, not so long ago, I longed to be normal again, just like everyone else. But now that I am getting used to my powers, I do not see the point.

‘What’s this really about- I thought?’ I squint, feeling more than a little betrayed.’

‘I mean, you’re the one who got me here.’ Oh, I was- mortified.

You are the one who made me the- way- I am.

Right- and now that I am finally adjusted, you decide to jump ship?

‘Seriously! Why are you doing?’

But instead of answering, she just closes her eyes.

Projecting an image of the two of us laughing and happy, frolicking on a beautiful, black-sand beach- remember all the good times. Saying this is it… thanks for the memories. But I just shake my head and cross my arms tighter, refusing to play until my questions are answered, about her and them…

She sighs and stares out the window of the tiny home for the last time looking back at me with the sun shining brightly, then turning toward me when she says, ‘I’ve already told you, my only recourse, my only way out of the hell making- as I should have, it all karma- and I want what I lost.

And the only way to do that is to relinquish the manifesting, the high life, the big-spending, and all the other extravagances- I have indulged myself in for the last hundred years so I can live the life of an ordinary citizen, too. I understand, Honest, hardworking, and humble, with the same day-to-day

struggles as anyone else- if not more- go for it.’

The whole point of this bath was to make me forget my disastrous day- including the subject of Shannon’s Question- likewise, that seems impossible. Even though I am feeling slightly- mellower than when I slid in twenty minutes ago, nothing can completely wash away that- memory.

Too bad bath salts cannot change the past. 'Nope,’ I admit with an unfulfilled- snarl.

'I- didn’t ask him to feel similar I.’

‘I thought we- agreed,’ she says,

sounding- exasperated. 'You were going- to ask him in trig when Kingsley had you trade papers.' 'We did agree,' I concede, 'likewise I not always sure about- humanly things.'

'Likewise, what, Savannah?' She interrupts.

'You're running out of time.' 'I know that.' Boy, do I know that? The salsa in my countdown timer is draining fast; graduation is just around the corner. Leaning my head back over the tub's graceful, curved edge, I let my hair hang to the floor below.

Along with a mess of a blond-haired person that defies all tries at- four. Control. I for one strength as well have a sea sponge on my head, since no- amount of 'likewise didn’t do the normal swap,’ I explain. 'He had us trade down the row instead of across the aisle.’ mewl and I can imagine the look of disgust on her face. me, one of the most prosperous underwater kingdoms in the world. I am a princess without- equal in most of the seven seas, or any other body of water, for that matter.

Raised to all the duties that my title needs and prepared to be my kingdom’s future star, I am valued,

revered, and loved by (greatest of) the undersea lapse. Named after the 'Star Girls.'

A mermaid and a princess, all bound into one.

Talk about every little human girl’s dream. 'I hate it when he goes to a professional development plant,’ she says. 'He always comes back and tries something new that never, ever works.’

'I- know,’ I agree, latching on to this divergent train of thought in the vain hope that it will make her- and me- forget our original topic. I am not above avoidance tactics. I will throw Kingsley

under the bus to save me from another lecture about seizing the day. 'It was a total flop.’

I- sit up a little straighter, gaining confidence in my distraction.

'The Dan field twins switched places, and most of the class ended upgrading their papers. Kingsley congratulated us on our high grades.’

I- had never given much thought to how I would die, though-

I- had had reason enough in the last few months- likewise, even if I had, I would not have imagined it like this. I stared without breathing across the long

room, into the dark eyes of the hunter, and he looked pleasantly back at me.

Surely- it was an effective way to die, in the place of someone else, someone- I loved. Noble, even. That ought to count for something. I knew that if I had never gone to Forks, I would not be facing death now.

Likewise, terrified as I was, I could not bring me to regret the decision. When life offers you a dream so far beyond any of your expectations, it is not reasonable to grieve when it ends.

The soared fishes smiled in a friendly way as he sauntered forward to kill me.

Good grades are a rare thing for me. Shannon’s on the valedictorian track and she tries to help me out, likewise, I am not learning anything by osmosis or association or whatever.

Can I like um- help it if all these subjects are like a foreign language to me?

My brain just was not wired for academic study. The only class I am sure of passing is art and only because Ms.

Puff fishes like me. Everything else might as well be advanced nuclear clam- it.

I have an underwater plant study. My mother drove me to the airport with the windows rolled down. Even in this world, airplanes are necessary, two times bigger than Earth was. Transforming from a mer-girl to a human-looking girl is done with a cast of a spell.

(Mercrux)

It was seventy degrees in the sea, the sky a perfect, cloudless blue. I was wearing no top, Besides, lately, our unified focus has been on the upcoming Spring Fling dance and not next week’s

homework. With the dance, only days away (as in three,) it seems a lot more urgent than an English essay on Animal Farm Tonight, though, I would rather talk about homework.

Or beauty is nudity and the products of knowing that it is not odd in our world. Or swarms of killer jellyfish, see us and say hey, likewise, come my eighteenth birthday in eighteen days, and being nude in front of all the boys was not odd- not that I count in, I will be just a girl.

It rains on this inconsequential town more than any other place in the

United States of America. It was from this town and its gloomy, omnipresent shade that my- mother escaped with me when- I was only a few months old. It was in this town that I had been compelled to spend a month every summer until I was fourteen. Yet I never did leave the Walters edge, that was the year I finally put my foot down; these past three summers, my dad, the king of the sea, for two weeks instead. An action that I took with great horror. I detested lapse and air.

Yet, I loved the sun and the blistering heat. I loved the vigorous, sprawling city looking not being seen at

the lights. Anything other than the thing she is- asking about. I fumbled the plan… again.

The last thing I need right now is my sister sailing me out one more time that you are a coward, you can be there… it is not right. Son of a beached wheal. You would think I would get tired of hearing it, suck up my courage, and get it over with.

Likewise- the trouble is…

She is right. I am a coward. I give my tail fin a flick, sending the key lime bath salts sloshing up over my shoulders.

This is the same admonition I have- heard every week for the past three years.

Especially where Brody and is concerned. We mermaids are a cowardly bunch.

Keeping our existence, a total secret, makes cowardice a necessity. If we do not flee fast enough at the first sign of a passing ship, we might end up on the cover of next week’s Flash Paper. We are more of an escape- now- ask- questions- later kind of species.

'Savon,’ my mom said to me-

...?...

The last of a tousle's times-? Before I got on the- plane with the new body parts that I loved looking down at. 'You don’t have to do this. 'My mom looks like me, except with short hair and laugh lines. I felt a spasm of panic as I stared at her wide, child-like eyes.

How could I leave my loving, erratic blue, hair has shown- Karly never-ever changed did she, only her name- and the world she made for herself? We are happy to give her this would.

Likewise, with Brody it is similar I take my flight response to a whole new level of spinelessness. I can make all the

plans in the world, be fully ready to follow through, and then the instant he is within sight, I calm up. There should be a law against having trig this late in the day, Olivia complains about the desk next to mine.

Startled, I hastily cover me-daydream notes with my textbook and then look up at Olivia.

Likewise, his attention is focused- as mine should be- on our teacher and the equation on the board. I sigh with relief.

Before the accidental kiss and bond that brought us together, he sat one row over, on the other side of my recently

former crush, Brody. When I came back to Seaview and we started dating officially and for certain, Olivia made Brody switch so he could sit next to me.

I never knew Brody was such a pushover, likewise, I am glad. This is the only class Olivia and I have together, And, I would rather have him at my side, unconcernedly as I can, I flip to a clean page and try, make-believe, to focus on math. My attention is still on the rock. Head hanging down over my textbook, I slide another sideways glance at his lysosome face.

Mostly just because I can, likewise, and because he is nice to look at all is there?

'It’ll be great. I love you, Mom.’ She hugged me tightly for a minute, and then I- got on the plane, and she was gone.

It is a four-hour flight, another hour in a small plane- to town, and then an hour's drive.

Flying Chiaz Naztherth like- not bother me; the hour in the car- with I feel sea sickish, though, I was a little worried about. His dad had been nice about the whole thing. He seemed genuinely

pleased that I was coming to live with him for the first time with any degree of permanence. I should not be self-conscious by my love scribbles, because we are officially a couple now, so I have every right. Still, I do not want him to think I am any more of a lovesick guppy than he already knows.

Mother to fend for herself. Of course, she had Phil now, so the bills would get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, likewise still- 'I want to go,' I lied. I had always been a bad liar; likewise, I had been telling this lie so often lately that it sounded almost

convincing now. 'I will.’ 'I’ll see you soon,’ she insisted. 'You can come home whenever you want-I will come right back as soon as you need me.’ Likewise, I could see the sacrifice in her eyes behind the promise. 'Don’t worry about me,’ I urged.

There is not much fault to find in his strong jaw, dark blond hair, and the Caribbean- blue eyes. Eyes that remind me of my daddies, I am lucky if I can breathe, let alone tell him- how I feel.

Hormones are cruel like that. I am going to drown! I am only fifteen.

I have not gotten my driver’s license yet.

I have not surfed the famous Pipeline in what used to be Hawaii. I have not fallen in love-unless- my Sports Illustrated swimsuit poster counts. I barely had any breath left as I tried to reach- the surface. Then it hit me- not the meaning of life, likewise my surfboard. Time stood still- and even rewound. 'I love rewinding time, to see if things would be different.'

My underwater world was peaceful. I drifted helplessly like an astronaut who suddenly becomes detached from the mother ship. It is because I am a raging hormonal teenager

that I had this vision. of making love, and already having a pregnant belly.

Out of nowhere, she appeared- golden yellow and- sun- fire orange hair sparkled- similar tiny stars and flowed in the glistening water- before me.

The most wonderful, pinkish-lipped smile flashed before me. I know, right- Brody says from one-row over- We should start an ante Goldfish said-she-laughs. And what was that strange bikini bottom?

Aquamarine metallic splashed to her funky nouveau riche flipper gear. Nothing plastic on this girl. No silicone

or- liposuction marks. Just that sparkling golden heart.

Where did this angel girl come from, or is she one? Why was she- swimming at seven o'clock in the freezing morning? Why wasn't she drowning similar I was? There was no sign of a snorkel or a tank anywhere.

I tease him- with me being- yes know me. I had never seen this dream girl before. She did not go to Seaside High, which is a smaller building that is attached to the castle only by a long snaking breezeway, with long twisting spiraling steps that run down the side of

the towering hillside yet Seaside of the rock the castle sits upon, next to the Enchanted Seas.

'Golden hair?' ...It is like a memory.

Savanna, it is a message from that Earthman! He’s trying to find you!’

'It couldn’t be- that is impossible,’ I said, bewildered. 'This is way dangerous,’ Wave argued.

'It’s glacial! Read the rest-I am too freaked out!’

'Um- meet me at Seaside High Stadium, also next to the beachside of

black sand, (East of goalpost) at 7:35 A.M.’

‘’I want to thank you, 'for what?' She read on, with what was handed. 'Thank me?’ I asked, grabbing the parchment. Had my Earth many-ie boyfriend written this? - Clam- it-Then I will start working full- t time, he argues- be better, I insist- No more homework unit school fish- college. If I get in, that is.

My grades have been sub-mediocre-partly because many of the subjects are completely foreign to the mer-head-world, and partly because, like I

never thought about going to college, nevertheless school.

I did not need a degree to rule Thalassemia. Now that has all changed, and at my meeting with the school counselor this week, I learned that the only way I will get into college- any college- is to ace the SATs. I have enlisted my genius best human friend’s help and enrolled in an intensive test- prep class, likewise, I am not counting on a decent score.

Why did she swim like a fish? He is being a lot nicer too- I said to his Brody since I got over my ridiculous and

unfounded crush and started dating him instead. Tearing his attention. Her angelic skin glowed; her piercing ocean-blue eyes stared through me and touched my soul. She floated majestically before me, the gold locket in the shape of a heart dangling from her lovely neck. This had to be a dream, or a sure, sign that I had already died and gone to heaven! Away from the board, Olivia turns to face me, catching me staring- okay.

Well, still a mergirl, true, likewise an average mergirl just the same. At midnight, after my birthday- ball, I will sign the renunciation paperwork, inking Princess Waterlilies out of existence. In

her place, she will be plain old her, living on lapse, dating the boy she loves and trying to figure out this human thing finally. I am and facing a whole new wave of pressures that go along with a school diploma- things.

Sleeveless, white eyelet lace; I was wearing it as a farewell gesture. My carry-on item was a hallo bag. On a trip out of the sea to Pa State, a small town… I am not sure of the name… if sounds funny to me down here. Exists under a near-constant cover of clouds.

(Lust)

Naddalin- One thing that Nevaeh should be proud of is that she held the world record for squirting, 15 feet and loving yourself is not a sin, and all girls masturbate, she is my geyser.

I have to say this is one thing that I love that turns me on about her with me is this is a thing with her every 3 hours. So, we feel with all our girls, and that is around 11,000 girl masturbation is okay middle day out of 14,000 and there or 12 grades Grade 4 and up 9 years old girls and up is freedom of self-expression, so we hold the record for that also. Girls will be girls and all-day school needs time to get off in class before lunch, so- we see

nothing wrong with this… in school and at their desks. 10 hours of schooling… and then homework, sleep, and do it again.

Therefore, those girls wanted to play with her in the gym shower- think about it? She is an incredibly talented girl! Then again, all our girls have short skirts, and just like herself going to school panties is not needed. Age with our girls is not a factor, just when you feel you are ready to be like the girls that are older or the same as your feelings. Chiaz even said this was one thing he loved about her when making love, and even that is lovely and romantic.

Nevaeh- You know I used to think- I was odd for what I have, no I know that I am amazing to all my lovers, but it does not matter what your *gennies* look like as long as they get wet even if you have a tight keyhole like me, and you love them no matter what, and that is the turn-on, not childish thoughts, but the love of loving everything about yourself and her or even him.

I remember before Chiaz was ever in my life, I was illegally married Lily Anderson, this took place by having others stand-in for what looked like a boy-girl love, she took of him by getting in his head, by having others stand-in for us at

the altar and have a wedding well she was in his body, all we needed to do was sing our names, to make the document, yet have it looks to others as something else. I always thought that way, the one I loved in real life was the hunted ghost of Lily in his mind, body, and soul. And now I know that to be true...

I like all my lovers have had a contract just like this one. And so, should you if you are smart. Or just feel this out, it is your right, to do so right in this book. Keep the book to remember something to remember like your first time or first love. Chiaz remembers looking down at me

with big lashes and lusting loving eyes- that is the mental damage I have.

One last thing- thought Nevaeh- ‘Jenny used to tell me about how she would shake after an orgasm, and he would spray his boyish cute load all over her belly, almost to her chin, and she would squeeze a lot- like rolling out as a bloody bubble- of girly cummie out of her that looked like wet toothpaste all over his lower belly- she said they were so in love- I remember those days with my man- and had to go ever 15 minutes- without any condoms.

It is not that I don’t love him anymore, it’s more power and trust, and not answering anyone by myself.' Said Nevaeh under her breath.’

SEXUAL CONSENT FORMT this agreement is made-

_____, Year___

between_____

__ (hereinafter the ‘Proposer’)

and_____

(hereinafter the ‘Consenter.’) Whereas the Proposer and the Consenter are sexually attracted to each other and would like to manifest that sexual attraction through participation in one or more sexual acts; Therefore, the Consenter and the Proposer make their bodies available to each other for the previously mentioned purpose from time

___: ___ on date _____,
year___ (today's date if left blank) for a
period of ___ hours, during which period
they consent to participate in the
following activities. Activity (initial all
that apply) Proposer/Consenter _____ /
_____ Full body touching (external
only)_____ / _____ Kissing
with/without* the insertion of tongue into
mouth _____ / _____ Digital penetration
(receiving in _____ (specify
orifice(s))) _____ / _____ Digital
penetration (giving in _____
specify orifice(s))) _____ / _____ Oral
sex (receiving) _____ / _____ Oral sex
(giving) _____ / _____ Vaginal sex

(receiving: females only) _____ / _____ Anal sex (receiving)_____ / _____ Anal sex (giving: males only or females with toys)_____ / _____ Restraint, using the following devices _____ (specify) _____ / _____ Use of following devices in or on the body _____ (specify) _____ / _____ Other activities_____ (specify. Contraception the Proposer is using the following methods of contraception on an ongoing basis: _____.

Page 2of 3The Proposer will use the following methods of contraception and/or protection during vaginal/anal* penetrative activities:

_____

_____. The Consenter is using the following methods of contraception on an ongoing basis: _____. The Consenter will use the following methods of contraception and/or protection during vaginal/anal* penetrative activities:

_____

_____. Ratchet Clause

Whereas the Proposer and the Consenter are aware that attraction may escalate during the agreed upon sexual activities, and that both parties may desire to engage in activities heretofore not consented to, the parties agree as follows.

(Check One) a) ☐There shall be no sexual activity of any kind other than that specified and consented to in this agreement without the establishment of a new, separate agreement. (See Clause 1 below.) Initialed (Proposer) _____ Initialed (Consenter) _____b) ☐Sexual activity of a kind other than that specified and consented to in this agreement shall be presumed to be consented to with the retroactive checking of the appropriate activity above, even after the signing of this agreement. (See clause 1 below.) Initialed (Proposer) _____ Initialed (Consenter) _____c) ☐Sexual activity of a kind other than that specified and

consented to in this agreement shall be presumed to be consented to by mutual verbal consent during the activities engaged in under the consent given in the present agreement. (See Clause 2 below.) Initialed (Proposer) _____ Initialed (Consenter) _____Clause 1. Whereas both Proposer and Consenter recognize that alternatives a) and b) are likely significantly to disrupt any activities consented to under this agreement; Therefore, the Proposer and the Consenter further agree that should the disruption of agreed activities, caused by the making of a further agreement (under a) above) or the retroactive amendment of

this agreement (under b) above), result in a loss of desire to continue the activities herein consented to, consent for those activities consented to herein may/may not* be withdrawn by the verbal statement of one of the parties to this agreement.

Clause 2. Whereas both Proposer and Consenter recognize that alternative c) involves verbal consent of which no physical evidence will exist thereafter; Therefore, the Proposer and the Consenter further agree that such consent shall/shall not* be recorded using an audio recording device; and Whereas both Proposer and Consenter recognize

that should no audio recording of verbal consent under this ratchet clause be made, neither party could subsequently prove affirmative consent to the activities that were verbally agreed upon; Therefore, both parties hereby waive their right to claim that no such affirmative consent was given. Equivalently, the Proposer and the Consenter hereby consent to any further activities that can be deemed to follow naturally from the activities herein consented to. Accidental Violation Whereas sexual activity is likely to involve rapid movement and impaired judgment; Whereas either party to this agreement,

being male, may, through no fault and without intent, penetrate a female orifice not made available for sexual activity under this agreement; Therefore, the Proposer and the Consenter agree as follows; ☐-That such an incident shall be regarded as an assault and the burden of proof to the contrary shall fall on the male party to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the female party that the incident was accidental, and acceptance of such a demonstration shall be taken as implying retroactive affirmative consent; ☐-That such an incident shall be regarded as an accident, and retroactive affirmative consent will be assumed. Failure to

Perform Whereas consent to participate in sexual activities does not guarantee the ability to perform those activities, Therefore, failure to perform such as acts as consented to under this agreement for reasons including, but not limited to physical, psychological, or emotional impairment, shall not be considered a violation of this agreement; and both the Proposer and the Consenter waive any right to legal redress for such failure to perform. Early Termination This agreement may be terminated at any time during the period of consent agreed upon herein by the mutual written consent of both the Proposer and the Consenter.

Proposer’s Signature

_____ Date

_____Consenter’s Signature

_____ Date

_____(optional) Witness

Signature _____

Date _____